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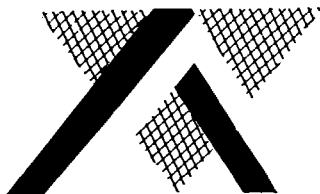
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SCREEN

INCORPORATING SCREEN EDUCATION



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EDITORIAL

The Royal College of Art has reserved the right to take action against Channel 4 because it broadcast *The Song of the Shirt*, and may also bring an action against the makers of the film, the Film and History Project. The issue, at one level, is over ownership of the rights of the film, but there are questions to ask which go beyond the simple ascription of copyright, and they are questions which all educationists, including the Royal College of Art, will want to consider.

The RCA's case and motives will no doubt emerge and no good will be done now if these are presented as narrowly self-seeking: the dismemberment of the education system zealously undertaken by an extremist government is inducing odd reactions from educational institutions of all kinds, and if the RCA wants to avoid controversy or even make money in the interests of long-term survival, then few of us are in a position to throw stones. Nevertheless, from the little that has emerged it seems that the College is taking an unexpectedly narrow view of what a film is and how its cultural value is to be set against institutional claims to ownership and responsibility.

The production and distribution of *The Song of the Shirt* represented a challenge, as many independent films do, to dominant notions of these activities. Far from being a discrete object, the film was part of a project which had been in production for a considerable time at the point when one member of the group entered the RCA Film School. For over four years a range of cultural workers gave their labour to the project with small hope of material gain, and the issues proposed and worked through by the film presuppose the active and critical participation of diverse audiences. On various occasions members of this Editorial Board have witnessed directors Sue Clayton and Jonathan Curling developing this relationship with

the audience, deliberately combatting the construction of their role as authors and returning again and again to the audience's experience of this and other representations of women, of history, and of class struggle. Even during the stages of production, audiences contributed ideas and arguments, and the distribution and exhibition of the film have always demanded careful contextualisation, often with support materials from cultural workers not directly involved in film production. If the film has a cultural value, and, in relation to Channel 4, an exchange value, it is because of the practices associated with the film rather than the fact of its existence as a material (in the crudest sense) object. The same is probably true of most films in Channel 4's *Eleventh Hour* slot.

What has all this to do with the RCA's attempt to claim some measure of copyright control? For whatever reason, and, again, they are not unique in having to face contradictions forced up by the current conjuncture, the College seems to be behaving like a Hollywood production company in seeing the film not as one component of a cultural practice but as a marketable commodity which is now exploitable. Whether their case would stand up in court is not our concern here, but the spectacle of a cultural institution attempting to limit or even prevent, on legalistic grounds, the fullest dissemination of what is, supremely, an educative enterprise, is dispiriting beyond words.

There may be another dimension to this particular contradiction: does the assertion of at least partial rights on the part of the RCA also mean that they are claiming control, or even veto rights, over the film? What are the implications of this? Will the College only allow the distribution and screening of films produced there which are consistent with its sense of cultural and political appropriateness? Is a film as complexly conceived and executed as *The Song of the Shirt* suitable to be so assessed? How will this be done? No doubt there are a mass of institutional and legalistic complexities attached to *The Song of the Shirt* case; there always are in copyright cases. No doubt the RCA sees itself as acting in the long term interests of its film and video students. But the rest of the education community should watch with concern to see whether or not a major cultural force in Britain is capable of recognising that there are values at stake other than those of the market place or law courts.

THE EDITORIAL BOARD

CORRECTION

Editorial apologies to readers and Michael O'Pray for the typographical errors in his article, 'Movies, Mania and Masculinity' in our issue of November-December 1982. On page 64, the first two sentences of the second paragraph should read: 'Unconsciously faced with knowledge of the separation from the mother and the breast, and therefore of

the dependence on them, the infant experiences intense feelings of fear and loss, feelings which without the manic defences would lead to utter despair. Through phantasies of control of internal objects identified with these objects of sustenance and dependence, the infant denies any dependence while at the same time by that very control accedes to the dependence denied.'

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16+ EXAMINATIONS IN MEDIA STUDIES

The current confusion over the common system of examination at 16+ is no reason to ignore the issue. Such uncertainties cannot continue indefinitely and media educators would be wise to be prepared for a possible rapid resolution.

With this in mind the working group on 16+ draft national criteria for media studies, convened with some urgency following the November 1981 BFI/ Goldsmiths national conference, has continued its deliberations. A draft document will be published in the March/April '83 edition of Screen, together with details of a day conference in early May to discuss this and amend it as necessary. This process, involving both an appraisal of current practice and a calculation of appropriate directions for the development of media studies in schools, is clearly an important one; it is envisaged that the document which emerges following the conference will have substantial strategic value in future negotiations. It is therefore hoped that as many people as possible will attend the conference and/or make representations to the 16+ Working Group, c/o SEFT, 29 Old Compton Street, London W1V 5PL.

BRITISH BROADCASTING AND INTERNATIONAL COMMUNICATIONS

AN INTRODUCTION BY ED BUSCOMBE.

Television, at least in Britain, has always been more strictly *national* than the cinema. The history of the British film industry has been the history of its attempts to define a space, both economic and cultural, within which its difference, its Britishness, could exist. But always the limits of that space have been determined not by the power of the indigenous industry but by an outside force: that of Hollywood. The strength of the Hollywood model has been such that it has been able to occupy whatever space it chose, thus leaving to the native industry only those marginalised sectors such as the documentary or the avant-garde which it disdained. And even then those sectors were able to achieve their limited effectivity only through state protection.

Television, on the other hand, has had state protection from the start. The reasons are not hard to find. Broadcasting was a medium capable of direct political effects. Its immediacy, its capacity to bring information and comment instantly to bear upon any situation, made it potentially a dangerous weapon in the hands of 'irresponsible' elements. This in itself did not make direct state regulation inevitable, as the United States demonstrate. But in Britain with its strong central government and securely established cultural and political elite the forces in favour of state control went virtually unchallenged.

As a result British broadcasting has always been both economically and culturally in a very strong position. Foreign (which is to say, American) pene-

tration has been kept at a minimum. *Dallas* may have been one of the most popular programmes ever to be screened on British television, but the 14% quota of foreign-originated material allowed on to British television screens remains one of the lowest in the world. And while American models for quiz shows, cop series and situation comedies have been important influences, it is still true that, for better or worse, British television has a very British flavour. *Coronation Street* may be a soap opera, and soap operas may have originated in America, but there is nothing very American about the *Rovers Return*.

While this situation is for some a cause for self-congratulation, for *Screen* it has posed a difficult problem. As a journal devoted in the main to cinema *Screen* sought, and largely found, an international audience. But increasingly, and particularly now with the advent of the new Channel Four, cinema in Britain can no longer be considered in isolation from television. Even if it were not the case that television poses urgent questions to cultural theory in its own right (and that case has been evident to many for some time now), its importance in the production and circulation of cinema demands attention. But the danger here for *Screen* is that the more it talks about television the more it may cut itself off from its international audience; thus reproducing in microcosm the provincialness which is one of the recurrent limitations of British cultural life. We see little of other people's television; they see little of ours. And the fact that *Coronation Street* is

now available on cable TV in Pittsburgh (to employ again the example of that peculiar programme, so emblematic of British television) hardly goes very far towards ameliorating the problem of cultural specificity.

To some extent this issue of *Screen* remains embroiled within this difficulty. Some of the writing relates to programmes and issues which will have only marginal significance to those outside Britain. But other contributions address themselves to issues which extend beyond national boundaries: the whole question of the relation between the nation state and the international communications industry is perhaps of the most pressing political

importance, as the following articles by Nicholas Garnham and Jill Forbes demonstrate. For the relatively safe and stable protection which television in Western Europe has enjoyed for 30 years is now under serious threat from the forces of international capital. The ability of those forces to capture for themselves the power of new technologies such as cable and satellite may destroy the very basis of national television. And thus, through a bitter twist of irony, *Screen's* problem, that television is too national to be discussed in a journal unwilling to be confined by national borders, may be in the process of solution. Television is becoming internationalised, whether we like it or not.

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Visible Fictions

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PUBLIC SERVICE VERSUS THE MARKET

**NICHOLAS GARNHAM CONSIDERS THE
IMPACT OF NEW INFORMATION
TECHNOLOGIES ON THE FUTURE OF
BRITISH BROADCASTING.**

EVEN THE MOST cursory study of the history of social development in general and mass-communication development in particular should make one chary of accepting any forecasts of rapid change. Indeed such forecasts, as now those associated with the so-called Information or Post-Industrial Society, are usually part of the propaganda for a particular form of social change. Nonetheless it is clear, I think, that in March 1982 British broadcasting entered a period of crucial historical transition which may in retrospect be as significant as the founding of the BBC itself. On March 4 the Home Secretary announced that the government was granting a licence to the BBC for the provision of two Direct Satellite Broadcasting services with a planned start in 1986. One of these services is to be a Pay TV service, the other a best of British or best of Europe service financed out of an additional licence fee. The government has not ruled out the possibility of granting further licences, but these will depend upon decisions as to

the type of satellite system to be launched. In its 1981 report on Direct Broadcasting by Satellite the Home Office envisaged 'a modest but early start with a two-channel satellite system by 1986'. However it seems likely that provision of the satellite will be left to a private consortium involving the Rothschild Bank, British Aerospace, GEC-Marconi and British Telecom which will lease transponders to service providers. Since British Aerospace already have a contract to construct Europe's experimental L Sat and since British Telecom in its new commercially aggressive deregulated mood will itself have a considerable demand for satellite capacity, there is a real possibility that a satellite with the capacity for the full five television channels allocated to the United Kingdom may be launched. In such an eventuality the government might well authorise additional satellite TV services perhaps from the Independent Broadcasting Authority (IBA), perhaps from private companies such as Satellite TV Ltd, who are at present broadcasting an experimental advertising-financed service to Europe.

On March 22 the Cabinet's Information Technology Advisory Panel (ITAP) issued a report on Cable Systems which advocated an immediate start on a massive £2.5 billion programme to cable urban Britain with a system capable of delivering at least 30 television channels. They argued that this project should be undertaken by the private sector and that the necessary funds would only be made available in sufficient quantities and at sufficient speed if the entrepreneurs were allowed to offer deregulated Pay TV. Following this report the Home Office set up the Hunt Committee and gave it until September 1982 to consider, not whether this development of cable TV should take place, but given that it was to take place, whether and if so how existing broadcasting services should be protected.

The Hunt Committee has now recommended that cable expansion be allowed to go ahead as soon as possible under a system of national regulation, in the words of the *Sunday Times*, 'so liberal as to be invisible'. It is proposed that a national cable authority should franchise cable operators for eight years; that all controls on programming and advertising content should be retrospective and in response to complaints; that although operators will have a monopoly in each area there should be no controls on pricing, as much advertising as they can sell, no quota of British material, no requirement to provide a balanced service or impartial coverage and merely 'a presumption that all systems should provide children's programmes, education and a community service'. Doubts about the effects of unrestricted competition on broadcasting schedules, of the fragmentation of audiences on the legitimacy of the licence fee, about the syphoning off of programmes and of advertising revenue are waved airily aside without serious argument. The only concessions made to the protection of public service broadcasting are the proposal to disallow pay-per-view, to extend to cable the provisions of section 30 of the Broadcasting Act 1981 which prevents anyone obtaining exclusive rights to specified national sporting events and to make the cable operators continue to carry the broadcasting services.

The Gospel according

Cable should be innovative, experimental and sensitive to local feelings.

Cable TV breaks down into four functions — the cable providers, cable operators, programme or national service providers and the programme makers.

Ownership

The greatest of these is the cable operator — the only one requiring a franchise.

There should be a minimum of constraints to provide the maximum variety and choice for the viewer.

Central and local government, political parties and organizations and religious bodies should not own systems or have their own channels.

The press, independent television, local radio contractors and foreign companies should be able to own a minority of shares in cable companies.

It would be desirable, but not essential to have some local participation in the ownership of cable companies.

British Telecom must compete within cable companies to secure franchises.

Regulation

The supervisory body should be a new quango with powers to award franchises and when necessary override local authorities in granting wayleaves.

The IBA should not fill the role of this supervisory body.

Franchising decisions should take into account — the size of the areas; speed of system installation; ownership of and interests represented; the channel capacity and range and diversity of programmes, including the financing arrangements; provisions for community programmes and local access and the intentions regarding the provision of interactive services.

The term of a franchise should last eight years except in the first instance where it should be ten to take into consideration the setting up time and expense.

Existing cable operators should be able to continue operations pending being granted a franchise for their area. There will be no guarantees they will win the area but will be considered favourably. In any event they may continue their non-pay-cable services.

Oversight, as the regulatory body is referred to, should keep in touch with what is going on, serve as a forum of advice to operators, consider complaints, keep an eye on the use of UK programme material, developments in advertising, judge whether operators are living up to their promises and respond flexibly as cable develops.

HUNT/2

Above, the Hunt Report as digested in *Broadcast*, October 18 1982.

to the Lord Hunt

Penalty for gross abuse of cable obligations should be loss of franchise. A less drastic alternative would be the imposition of a regulatory regime on the cable operator for a period of time requiring the submission of programme schedules or advance vetting of programmes or ads.

Income should come from rental charges for a basic tier, from subscription for special channels, plus advertising and clearly defined sponsorship of programmes.

There should be a bar on pay-per-view for the time being.

There should be unlimited cable channels.

Cable operators should be free to negotiate the relay of any out of area ITV service.

Imported programming should not be subject to limiting quotas.

Public service broadcasting requirements of range and balance should not be applicable to cable TV, except in news.

There should be no obligation, but a presumption that cable systems will provide facilities for community programming and local access.

Cable is not the same as publishing and should adhere to the same obligations as the BBC and IBA in not offending good taste or decency.

An electronically locked device to keep children away from X films could allow the shift worker to pay for and see adult films or cable channels any time during the day.

News should always be presented impartially, otherwise there is no obligation for such impartiality on individual channels.

There should be no minimum quota on British material and no restrictions on films which would favour the cinema industry.

Both local programming and national networks are envisaged.

Among the safeguards for broadcasters should be the continuance of the must-carry rule to relay all existing and future BBC, ITV and radio services for free.

There should be restrictions on major sporting events being shown on cable.

The existing cable operators should be excluded from the must-carry rule for up to five years provided they supply off-air services by alternative means. — SF

Finance

Programming

Safeguards

This last provision is in fact watered down by a suggestion that existing operators should be allowed a five year period during which they can drop the delivery of existing broadcasting services, so long as they provide their subscribers with alternative means of reception. This may turn out to be the most significant recommendation in the whole report. Given the high capital cost of new high-capacity cable systems and, as we shall see, the pessimistic projections of the potential profitability of cable services, the most likely immediate development will be an attempt by the existing operators to make a fast buck out of their existing, obsolescent systems rather than, as the government fondly hopes, using revenues from entertainment cable TV to fund investment in new wide-band cable systems.

Nevertheless we are certain to witness a massive increase in the pace and scale of broadcasting development, with scarcely any public debate. In 1946 the BBC TV service came back on the air after its wartime break. In 1956 the public service monopoly was broken and Independent Television (ITV) introduced commercial broadcasting into the UK. In 1964 BBC2 was launched and finally in November 1982 Channel 4 went on the air. Each of these stages of expansion involved a lengthy process of public enquiry and associated debate. Why then this rush to develop new television services, and what are its implications?

Deregulation and the Electronics Market

What is happening in Britain is part of a much wider international pattern. In the United States there is the move to deregulate the broadcasting and telecommunications industries, in Europe a continuing campaign, most successful so far in Italy, to break the public broadcasting monopoly and introduce private, advertising-financed stations and networks. These developments are in their turn determined by underlying economic trends and the efforts of transnationals, often backed by the economic planning instruments of nation states such as Japan and France, to develop the market for so-called information goods and services as a new growth sector. Since the late '60s electronics has been one of the key sectors of the world economy from several points of view. As productivity levelled off and profits dropped in more traditional manufacturing sectors and product lines the transnationals moved into the electronics sector in search of new products, new markets and renewed growth. In many cases this was also a chance to capitalise on US government research and development expenditure in the defence and space industries. Furthermore, as competition in general sharpened in consumer markets, advertising and marketing expenditure rose and with it the pressure to find new media outlets for it. In addition, as the transnationals moved much of their labour intensive manufacturing activity to the Third World in search of lower labour costs, they required ever more sophisticated communications systems in order to manage what had

become 'dispersed' corporations. At the same time the member states of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, in order to protect their economies, were forced to at least attempt to restructure those economies in the direction of high technology. But as the world recession has deepened competition in this sector, both between firms and between nations, has become ever fiercer.

Thus the drive to launch a British satellite and create, as rapidly as possible, a British cable industry is fuelled, as is openly admitted, by the needs of the corporate sector for enhanced communications facilities and the increasingly desperate national search for a share of the international market in high technology products. In this situation not much sensitivity is likely to be shown to the possible domestic, social and cultural effects of such expansion. The irony is that in each individual European country the same story is being repeated. No one really wants cable TV or a Direct Broadcasting Satellite, they will say, but we must have it before the British or before the Germans or before the French as a shop-window for foreign buyers of technology.

At the same time the white goods (washing machines, refrigerators, etc) and TV set markets are saturated so that manufacturers in the consumer electronics sector are in search of new products and new markets. Central to this search is an attempt to turn the domestic TV set into a multi-purpose visual display unit (VDU), the core of a home entertainment and information processing centre, by offering a range of plug-in peripherals or enhanced facilities such as video cassette recorders (VCRs), video-discs players, teletext and viewdata decoders, home computers, etc. Efforts are concentrated upon the TV set in part because it now occupies between 30 and 40% of most people's available freetime, is their major source of information and entertainment and absorbs about 25% of household leisure expenditure. It also provides people's 'main point of entry into other sections of the entertainment industry and the arts'.¹ The introduction of so-called information technology into the cultural sphere is an attempt not only to sell new hardware products, but also an attempt by a range of cultural producers, by means of satellite, cable, cassette and disc, to find new means of delivering audio visual products for viewing on the domestic TV set, which circumvent the control of that supply at present exercised by the publicly regulated broadcasting institutions. This is particularly clear in the case of advertising and one of the main commercial interests in European direct satellite broadcasting is the opportunity it offers to break the very tight control on advertising time and content maintained on most European national TV systems. Britain unfortunately, with its comparatively high level of both TV advertising time and advertising expenditure, appears to be the base for such operations, much to the disquiet of some of our European neighbours.

While there are quite explicit elements of national economic planning in the current situation I do not want to foster an impression of a huge capitalist conspiracy. The corporations, and indeed nations, involved are driven by an increasing sense of desperation, and many of the initiatives

¹ Graham Murdock, 'Programming: Needs and Answers', paper delivered to the conference 'New Dimensions in Television', Fondazione Rissoli, Venice, March 1981.

² See the *Financial Times*, July 6 1982.

³ See *InterMedia*, January 1982.

⁴ See the *Financial Times*, May 19 1982.

in this area have failed and will continue to do so. The various video disc systems for instance appear so far to be a very expensive flop. Cable TV in the United States is faced by mounting debts and ever disappearing profit hopes.² There are many in the industry who regard the BBC's Satellite Pay TV plans as foolhardy. And the figures put forward by the ITAP to support their argument that cable expansion will be financed out of Pay TV profits do not make much sense.

First the capital cost of the system seems to have been seriously underestimated. The figure quoted of £2.5 billion to cable half UK households seems to have been based upon the £200-300 per house yardstick for 'green field' sites. A more realistic industry estimate is £500-600 per household, giving a total of £5-6 billion.³ British Telecom's most recent estimate is £5-6 billion.⁴ These figures are important because they indicate the likely measure of profitability of any investment in cable systems and therefore the scale of the resources that the industry is likely to be able to devote to programming. If we extrapolate revenue figures for Britain from existing US figures by scaling down for the smaller British market, we arrive at a total system revenue of £340 million per annum and Pay Cable revenue of £80 million per annum, which does not provide an adequate return on the capital investment, let alone cover administration and programme costs. Moreover the revenue would be roughly equivalent to that of an admittedly underfinanced Channel 4 and is supposedly to be spread across a multiple channel provision.

And yet these figures must be regarded as optimistic in the extreme since several factors favour cable in the United States as compared with the United Kingdom. The dispersed suburban style of urban development there puts a greater stress on home entertainment. Bad over-air reception means that 48% of those receiving just the basic cable service say they do so primarily for enhanced reception of network TV. The level of advertising on US network TV puts a real competitive premium on ad-free services. Perhaps most important of all there is a market on a continental scale within which satellite distribution of pay cable has made a crucial economic difference by enabling entrepreneurs to put together small, scattered market segments into one serveable market. Moreover recent figures demonstrate the danger of extrapolating consumption growth curves. The de-connection rate is now as high as the connection rate in the US.

The figures also look unrealistic if compared with actual UK consumer expenditure patterns. The ITAP suggest a likely expenditure, based upon existing US expenditure of \$23 per month per average pay cable subscriber, of £13 per month, £5 for the basic service and £8 for additional pay services, in addition to the purchase or rental of a decoder. Such a figure should be set against Family Expenditure Survey figures showing an average monthly household expenditure on all media entertainment and associated hardware of £21.60 per month (1980 prices). Of this £5.40 is spent on the reception of existing over-air broadcasting, ie licence and rental or purchase of the set. We must assume that this will continue. The other major item of expenditure is books, magazines and

newspapers at £6.80 per month. This is potentially vulnerable to an expansion of cable with perhaps serious social and industrial consequences. But it is hard to imagine a shift of consumption patterns sufficient to match the assumption of £13 per month on cable. Alternatively, if such a shift were to take place, the consequences across the whole range of our social and cultural life would be serious.

A New Era of Abundance?

The advocates of the benefits of information technology in the cultural sphere argue that it will usher in a new era of cultural freedom, diversity and abundance. One argues that it will mark 'a great shift from producer to consumer sovereignty in Western European societies', creating 'an Alexandria without walls'.⁵ Another claims that cultural freedom will be secured 'by making information in every form cheaply and conveniently available'.⁶ In particular the argument is couched in terms of deregulation, the need and opportunity to sweep away what they present as the stuffy, bureaucratic, confining censored old world of public service broadcasting in favour of the exciting new world of market provision. As another advocate recently put it:

Once the technical pretext for electronic publishing has gone the whole inverted pyramid of regulation and control must be dismantled. Those who are passionately for freedom in communication and publishing, whether print, electronic or simply oral, need now to gird themselves for a prolonged struggle against old habits and vested interests to ensure that the new freedoms which new technology will make possible, are translated into real freedoms for both producers and consumers.⁷

There are two different and equally unjustified assumptions lying behind this argument. First, that the public service concept is based upon scarcity of frequencies. Second, that once technology gives us the means, the market is superior to a regulated public service as a mode of cultural production and distribution. The first argument is simply untrue. The available frequencies could have been engineered to provide thirteen channels in the major population areas and, even with the priority given, within the public service tradition, to equal coverage for all, the fourth channel has been available for allocation since Pilkington reported in 1962. Channels have been limited, whether rightly or wrongly, for social and economic, not technical reasons. The second argument cannot in my view be sustained against the weight of evidence of how media provision governed by market forces actually operates. For the truth is that while the public regulation of broadcasting has been *legitimised* in terms of frequency scarcity, its *justification* lies in its superiority to the market as a means of providing all citizens, whatever their wealth or geographical location, equal access to a wide range of high quality entertainment, information and education, and as a means of ensuring that the aim of the programme producer is the satisfaction of

⁵ Anthony Smith, *Goodbye Gutenberg: the Newspaper Revolution of the 1980s*, Oxford University Press, 1980.

⁶ Anthony Hyman, *The Coming of the Chip*, London, New English Library, 1980.

⁷ Peter Jay, speech to the Edinburgh TV Festival reported in the *Times*, August 27 1981.

a range of audience tastes rather than only those tastes that show the largest profit.

It is the purpose of this article to challenge the view that the market is superior to public service as a mode of cultural production and consumption, and to show that we are here in the presence of ideology in its pure, classical form; that is to say a social analysis that not only misrepresents its object of analysis by focusing on its surface rather than its underlying structure and by denying its real history, but also misrepresents it in such a way as to favour the interests of the dominant class. In this case the trick is played by concentrating upon the technical potentialities rather than upon the social relations that will determine the form in which those potentialities are realised and by denying history by exaggerating the novelty of the process in question. Now I would not want to deny either the manifold failings of public-service broadcasting or the marginal increase in individual freedom offered by a video-recorder in terms of the ability to watch the offerings of the broadcaster at times of your rather than the scheduler's choice. But what we are in fact being offered is not a more socially responsive, politically accountable, diverse mode of cultural interchange in the electronic sphere, but on the contrary the expansion of price and profit, of commodity exchange, as the dominating mode of organisation in yet another area of cultural production and consumption, as though this were a new phenomenon. Instead, we are witnessing merely the latest phase in a process integral to the capitalist mode of production.

This is a process referred to variously as 'the industrialization of culture'⁸ and 'the colonization of leisure'⁹ by which 'massive market interests have come to dominate an area of life which, until recently, was dominated by individuals themselves'.¹⁰ It is a development that goes back at least 150 years in Britain, part of a wider process by which commodity exchange invades wider and wider areas of social life and the private sphere expands at the expense of the public sphere, driven by capital's restless and relentless search for new areas in which to realise surplus value, thus introducing the 'dull compulsion of economic relations' to more and more spheres of social life. In assessing the likely impact of the new information technologies on broadcasting—and because of the central position it occupies in the cultural field—on our whole cultural life, we are not entering entirely uncharted waters. We have a lot of accumulated historical experience of the dynamics of the cultural sphere in a capitalist mode of production. When we hear the Peter Jays of this world arguing that the new technology gives us the opportunity to fight for 'freedom of the press' in the field of electronic publishing, we need to remember that the actual history of the press is not one of developing freedoms, but on the contrary that the growth of an advertising-financed, commercial mass circulation press destroyed the independent working-class and radical press (as was the intention), steadily reduced the range of available views and information, incorporated nascent oppositional movements, helped to depoliticise our society and placed control of the channels of information in fewer and fewer

⁸ Asa Briggs, *Fisher Memorial Lecture*, University of Adelaide, 1960.

⁹ Haluk Sahin and John P Robins, 'Beyond the Realm of Necessity', *Media, Culture & Society*, January 1981.

¹⁰ Asa Briggs, *op cit.*

hands.¹¹ We need to remember that we live in a class society and that not all producers and consumers are equal, and that in deciding the characteristics of the future 'information society' the preferences of the members of the board of AT&T and IBM and their corporate clients weigh somewhat heavier than those of any member of the European working class. Indeed it may at present be regrettably true that their preferences weigh more heavily than even those of the whole of the organised European working class.

Let us then turn to look in more detail at the structural dynamics of the cultural sphere within the capitalist mode of production. The first point to stress, against the grain of the ideological discourse that dominates cultural analysis, a discourse of individual taste, creativity etc inherited from a pre-industrial era, is that cultural relations are in general dominated by normal capitalist market mechanisms and most culture is produced and distributed, by what have come to be known as cultural industries, under conditions similar to those reigning in other economic sectors.

However, the sphere of cultural commodity production does have certain specific tendential characteristics that need stressing.¹² Firstly, because there is a sense in which each cultural product is a prototype, the cost of production, what are known in the newspaper industry as first copy costs, tend to be high relative to the cost of reproduction and distribution. This means that there are exceptionally high returns to economies of scale leading to a constant push towards audience maximisation, since the marginal profit from each additional consumer is high relative to marginal cost. Secondly because demand is highly elastic (in the sense that for any one cultural commodity it is impossible to predict whether it will be a hit or a flop) profitability depends upon being able to offer a repertoire, so that the very high profits from the few hits can subsidise the need to write off most of the rest of the product. In the record industry for instance only one single in nine and one LP in sixteen makes a profit, and in a typical company 3% of the output can account for 50% of the turn-over.¹³ Similarly in the film industry in a typical year the top ten films out of 119 in the US market took 22% of the box office receipts and the top 40 80%.¹⁴ This has had two consequences:

a) The risks of cultural production can only be lowered to an acceptable level by a high and sustained level of investment in a whole production programme. The small independent producer in general and in the long run has no chance.

b) Reinforcing the high returns to economies of scale, it makes control of distribution rather than of production *per se* crucial.

As the history of the US film industry amply demonstrates, a small group of companies has been able to retain tight control over both the US and world markets for over half a century without retaining control of exhibition and while actually reducing their direct involvement in production. Control of distribution, however, enables a wide range of

¹¹ See James Curran, 'Capitalism and Control of the Press 1800-1975', in Curran et al (eds), *Mass Communication and Society*, London, Arnold, 1977.

¹² For a fuller version of the arguments in the following paragraphs see Nicholas Garnham, 'Towards a Political Economy of Culture', *New Universities Quarterly*, Summer 1977, and 'Contribution to a Political Economy of Communication', *Media, Culture & Society*, April 1979. Also Graham Murdock and Peter Golding, 'Capitalism, Communication and Class Relations' in Curran et al (eds) *op cit*.

¹³ See A Huet et al (eds), *Capitalisme et Industries Culturelles*, part 2 chapter 3, Grenoble, 1978.

¹⁴ See Nicholas Garnham, *The Economics of the US Motion Picture Industry*, a report for the European Commission, Brussels, 1980.

'independent' productions to be assembled into a programme and then offered to the widest possible range of audiences. Or rather, as the history of broadcasting shows, control of distribution allows the very construction of an audience out of disparate groups and individuals. Indeed there is a growing tendency in the cultural industries¹⁵, legitimised by an ideology of creative freedom, for the profit centres founded upon control of distribution to maintain a network of dependent and exploited production satellites, often themselves partially sustained out of public funds through cultural and educational budgets, onto whose shoulders can be shifted the costs and risks of research and development. Channel 4 is a partial example of that trend.

The result of these tendencies has been to produce culture industries characterised by a high level of oligopolistic control not only in national markets but across the world market (in the record industry five firms control 67% of the world market; in the film industry seven firms control 90% of the US domestic market, and 70% of the world market; in Britain three groups control 74% of daily newspaper circulation), and by a high level of horizontal integration, ie the development of conglomerates such as Thorn-EMI in Britain and Warner Communications in the US with an important market share across a wide range of different media. This enables the principle of the repertoire to operate not just in one media market but across markets so that a firm can typically offer a package involving film, TV series, book, record and merchandising such that each advertises the other and the risks can be spread.

These characteristics of the international culture industry are further reinforced by the specific structure of the consumer market in which the cultural distributors must compete to realise surplus value and maximise profit. This market is constrained by two factors, availability of time and availability of money. The free-time available to the average working person has only marginally increased in recent years. US figures show an increase for men from 34.1 hours per week to 39.3 hours per week between 1965 and 1975, virtually the whole of the extra time being taken up by TV viewing. Intense competition for this limited time market has two consequences:

a) A tendency for one medium to partially supplant another, ie the cinema to replace music-hall and TV to replace the cinema, newspaper circulation declining in the face of TV.

b) A tendency, as a recent Swedish study has shown,¹⁶ for the cost to the consumer of each unit of consumption time to rise in real terms because each new media service, especially the ones that depend upon domestic investment in the technological delivery system, involves an increased investment which cannot be matched by an increase in consumption time. These tendencies will of course be heavily reinforced by an expansion of TV channels.

At the same time the discretionary expenditure available for cultural consumption is also strictly limited, having grown in the UK since 1968 from 5 to 6½% of total consumer expenditure.¹⁶ If real diversity is to

¹⁵ Ivar Ivre, 'Mass Media: Costs, Choices, Freedom', *InterMedia*, September 1981.

¹⁶ *National Income and Expenditure*, 1979, London, Her Majesty's Stationers Office.

become a reality it can only be produced either by a concomitant growth in that expenditure or by redistribution of expenditure by fiscal means. Present figures show in particular how over the last decade increases in consumer expenditure on electronic hardware, especially TV, has exceeded the increase in available discretionary expenditure, leading to a marked fall in real terms in expenditure on printed matter. Furthermore because, owing to what is known as Baumol's disease, the real costs of cultural production have been rising, markets have had to be expanded to support a given level of production, reinforcing the oligopolistic and internationalising tendencies in the sphere of production itself.¹⁷

This is particularly clear in both TV and book publishing. Rising production costs and the intense competition for this narrow consumption market has also led to a rapid acceleration in the rate of obsolescence of cultural products. In the film industry, for instance, a high proportion of a film's total box-office receipts are earned in the first few weeks of release in nine major US metropolitan areas during twenty key weeks of the year.¹⁸ It is now estimated that the shelf life of the average paperback in the US is five weeks. Barriers to entry to these markets are being continually raised by rising promotion costs. The promotion of a feature film can now cost as much as the initial production costs.

The lack of discretionary consumer spending power has also led to a tendency right across the cultural field to make up the short-fall from advertising expenditure. While this too is not a source of income that can be expanded endlessly (indeed it may in the UK already be reaching its limits as a proportion of GNP) it also has serious distorting effects on cultural provision.¹⁹ In particular it reinforces the class stratification of cultural consumption that is already present in the structure of the market.

Class and Cultural Consumption

The class determination of cultural consumption takes place at two mutually reinforcing levels. It is firstly directly determined materially by the differential availability of both time and money. Members of lower socio-economic groups generally work longer hours in more tiring conditions than those higher up the social scale. In addition consumption of cultural goods and participation in cultural practices increases in range and amount over virtually the whole spectrum of activities, except TV viewing, as income rises. This is hardly surprising. It is just normally ignored in discussions of cultural policy.²⁰ The higher level of TV consumption among the poorer sections of the community is attributable to the higher proportion of their total discretionary expenditure tied up in the relatively fixed investment in the TV set and licence. Once this investment is made, subsequent consumption is virtually free, making them a captive audience. This material hierarchisation of cultural participation is matched at a second level by the distribution of what Bourdieu has called dispositions and competences.²¹ Dispositions refer

¹⁷ See William J Baumol and William G Bowen, 'On the Performing Arts: the Anatomy of their Economic Problems' in Mark Blaug (ed), *The Economics of the Arts*, Oxford, Martin Robertson, 1976.

¹⁸ Nicholas Garnham, *The Economics of the US Motion Picture Industry*, op cit.

¹⁹ See for instance James Curran, 'The Impact of Advertising on the British Mass Media', *Media, Culture & Society*, January 1981.

²⁰ See the *General Household Survey*, Central Statistical Office, London.

²¹ See Pierre Bourdieu, *La Distinction*, Paris, 1979; Nicholas Garnham and Raymond Williams, 'Pierre Bourdieu and the Sociology of Culture: an Introduction', *Media, Culture & Society*, July 1980.

to the internalised cultural norms acquired during childhood within the family and the immediate social environment which relate given modes of cultural participation to a given life style and class position such that those modes which are objectively unavailable for material reasons or because of lack of competences are de-legitimised and rejected as 'not for the likes of us'. Competences refer to the skills necessarily required for the consumption of certain forms of cultural product, for instance literacy for reading, but also and more subtly a range of interpretive and social codes for painting, music, live theatre, art galleries, etc. Such competences are acquired both inside the family and at school and thus reflect and pass on the differential endowment of cultural resources in families of different social classes and the class-based differential participation rates in education. It is to the existence and importance of dispositions and competences that the evidence of a growing Information Gap in Western societies between the information rich and the information poor points.

Thus not only does the nature of cultural production and distribution under capitalist market conditions tend to increasingly limit diversity of provision and to place control of that provision in fewer and fewer hands and further and further from the point of consumption, the structure of the market also distributes what choice there is available in a highly unequal way. There is a tendency in fact towards a two-tier market structure in which choice, being increasingly expensive, is offered to upper income groups, while an increasingly impoverished, homogenised service is offered to the rest. This tendency is reinforced by advertising which differentially subsidises media going to the rich and the poor.²² We can see this tendency clearly in the British press where middle market newspapers such as the *Express* are slowly being squeezed out.

Many will at this point want to argue that the current experience with cable TV in the United States contradicts this view. Not at all. The significance of the cable TV explosion in the US is that the linkage of cable systems by satellite has made it possible to bring together scattered pockets of upper-income cultural consumers who were not viable as separate local markets into one national market which it is now economic to service. But even then Home Box Office, which controls about 40% of the Pay TV market, is only delivering feature films to a market that for complex social reasons has been lost to the cinema. It in no way threatens the basic structure of the international film industry.

After all for 1982 the US film industry revenue from cable and video is estimated at 500 million dollars in relation to the US majors' total film and TV revenue in excess of 4 billion dollars. The signs are that all we are seeing at present is one new company, Home Box Office, itself part of the multi-media conglomerate Time-Life, joining the majors thanks to its oligopolistic control of Pay Cable Film distribution.²³ So far as the all news network is concerned two points need to be noted:

a) That the US has no truly national newspapers with which such a service would compete;

²² See James Curran, 'The Impact of Advertising on the British Mass Media', op cit.

²³ See Barry Litman and Susanna Eun, 'The Emerging Oligopoly of Pay TV in the USA', *Telecommunications Policy*, June 1981.

b) That even if there is an economically viable place for such a service in the US market with a 5-10% audience share, there is almost certainly not room in the long term for more than one.

Thus there will be a monopoly of news on cable and only a small addition to the diversity of provision across the nation as a whole. So far as the recently announced cultural channels are concerned it has been concluded, I think on good grounds,²⁴ that most of them are unlikely to last and have been launched by the networks to pre-empt satellite transponder space while they fight anti-trust prohibitions on entering the entertainment cable TV market. Indeed CBS has just announced the closure of its Culture channel after only 11 months of operation and at a loss of 40 million dollars. The real danger of the US situation is that the history of its film industry will repeat itself and the United States cable industry will use its large home market as a base for the invasion of the European market now that the technology is there to create the networks.

Thus the impact of information technology will not, as its advocates claim, lead to consumer sovereignty and greater choice. Such a claim can only be made if one looks at the technical determinants in the audio-visual field rather than the economic ones. If information technology is introduced, as its advocates propose and as seems likely, as part of a move of broadcasting out of the public sphere and into the private sphere, then it will have different effects at different class levels. It will reinforce existing tendencies to create a two-tier market with increased choice for the rich and decreased choice for the poor, no longer protected by the need for licenced-financed broadcasting to make so far as possible a range of provision available for all, and thus open to the full force of the international market. If one looks at British television over the last twenty years it has made available a far wider range of cultural experience to a far wider range of people than the cinema or the popular press during the same period. I believe the same is true to a greater or lesser extent throughout Europe. For all its failings, European public service broadcasting has represented a real step forward in the attempt to create a common culture. The introduction of information technology is likely to represent a massive retreat. The BBC's plans to offer a specialised Pay TV service via satellite are an indication of this.

Similar tendencies can be illustrated in the sphere of information as well as entertainment. As Dordick²⁵ and Schiller²⁶ have recently shown, the introduction of direct 'on-line' computerised information systems in the United States has led to a shift of information out of the public sphere and into the private where price barriers to access are making that information less freely available than it was before; where decisions on what information to make available and in what form are made on the basis of market considerations or other corporate interests rather than on the grounds of public interest. This whole development is seriously threatening the public library movement with its commitment to make information freely available to the whole population. What we are witnessing is a struggle to turn all information into private property and

²⁴ Brian Winston, 'Showdown at Culture Gulch', *Channels*, August-September 1981.

²⁵ Herbert Dordick, *The Emerging Network Marketplace*, New York, Ablex, 1981.

²⁶ Herbert Schiller, *Who Knows: Information in the Age of the Fortune 500*, New York, Ablex 1981.

²⁷ Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Critique of Dialectical Reason*, London, New Left Books, 1976.

therefore a source of private profit rather than the claimed development of a system to provide information widely and cheaply to all. The recent shift in Prestel's marketing policy towards serving the business user is a symptom of a similar development which is leading in many spheres to a division not only between the rich and the poor in the sphere of private consumption, but between the business and the domestic markets such that developments of new information services are privileging corporate rather than public use.

A further advantage claimed for the new information technologies as compared with over-air broadcasting is their interactive capacity and the QUBE interactive television experiment in the US is cited. It must be stressed that such interactive uses are still at the field trial stage. Only .0001 of US cable subscribers, for instance, use this interactive capacity to provide burglar and fire alarm services and 300,000 people at most are involved in the QUBE Trials. Moreover it has yet to be demonstrated that such services are viable on the market.

Such interactive capacity may indeed be useful for financial and commercial transactions, but claims that it allows the consumer in some way to talk back or the voter to be more fully involved in political decision-making are highly misleading. Such systems still place control over the agenda and questions in the hands of the controller of the network. Moreover it reinforces other tendencies in our society to what Sartre called 'serialization',²⁷ that is, a social structure within which isolated individuals only relate to each other statistically. It is the model of the consumer rather than the citizen which privileges privatised forms of knowledge and experience, as opposed to group participation. The privileging of the domestic TV set by all these developments is part of this wider and deeper social development.

Rethinking Public Service

While one can recognise that what is at stake in the struggle surrounding the new information technologies is a battle between the public service and market modes of cultural production and consumption, it is less easy to formulate an appropriate political strategy in response. At a simple level we can say that public service broadcasting must be defended and that similar principles must be defended and/or extended to other cultural spheres, for instance resisting the growth of sponsorship as a form of cultural subvention. But in order to do so the concept of public service itself needs to be rethought.

The crisis facing public service broadcasting throughout Europe is part of a wider political crisis, namely a profound shift in people's attitudes to the State and to the State's proper role in social life. There was once a time when the political battle lines were clearly drawn. On the one hand private capital and its allies defended the free market system against state encroachment, on the other the forces of the Left fought for state intervention as a means of at least redressing the social inequalities

of the capitalist market and perhaps eventually abolishing the market mechanism altogether. What marks the current crisis is a blurring of these old battle-lines by a widespread loss of faith in the Statist solution.

Behind the concrete economic and political problems facing public service broadcasting lies a crisis of the imagination—an inability to conceive of an alternative to broadcasting controlled by profit-seeking private capital other than as centralised, bureaucratic, inefficient, arrogantly insensitive to the people's needs, politically subservient to the holders of state power and so on. This crisis has its real material roots in the actual conduct of so-called public service broadcasting. Because the practice of public service broadcasting has been the practice of actual institutions, the BBC, RAI, ORTF, etc, the nature and potentialities of public service broadcasting have become identified in the public's mind with the actual historical practice of those institutions. One way of rekindling faith in a public service alternative is to examine the record of such institutions and to show how far their actual performance is from being the necessary shape of public service broadcasting. In this respect what lessons can we learn from the recent history of the BBC?

In 1962 the Pilkington Report on the Future of Broadcasting delivered its verdict on eight years of competition between a commercial and a public service system of broadcasting and came down decisively in favour of the latter. It granted the BBC a second TV channel and refused such a channel to ITV unless major changes were made in the ITV system to better insulate programme provision from what Pilkington saw as the harmful effects of dependence upon advertising revenue. This judgement on the relative merits of the two systems was at the time widely endorsed by politicians, not only on the left, but also within the Tory party as well, by intellectuals and more importantly by a significant proportion of the audience. After hitting a low of 27% of the audience in late 1957, the BBC had fought back against ITV to a situation of rough parity with shows ranging from comedy (*Steptoe and Son*, *Hancock*), police series (*Z Cars*), drama (*Play for Today*), to current affairs (*Tonight*), and late night satire (*That Was the Week that Was*). Such programming gained not only large audiences but also widespread critical acclaim. For a short period which lasted until 1965/66 and which included the launching of BBC2 and the introduction of colour, the BBC seemed, under the leadership of Sir Hugh Greene, to be in touch with and able to express a new, widespread, relatively progressive and popular political and cultural current. At this period a whole generation of intellectuals and cultural workers wanted actively to work for the BBC, seeing public service television in particular as one of the key areas of endeavour in a struggle to transform Britain in a politically and culturally progressive direction.

Within less than twenty years all that has changed. In their current financial crisis the BBC can now call on no significant sectors of public support among either politicians or intellectuals. While ironically their programmes are more popular than ever (they now regularly and convincingly win the ratings war with ITV) this seems to be with an audience

that no longer sees any meaningful distinction between the two systems. The Annan Committee report in 1977 was, in marked contrast to Pilkington, on balance more critical of the BBC than of ITV and the current government with no real opposition has expanded the commercial system by authorising a second commercial TV channel and by allowing commercial local radio to expand while so starving the BBC of funds that their system of local radio, far from expanding, is being cut back.

Many factors have led to this dramatic shift in the position of public service broadcasting, but I want only to examine those that can be attributed to the BBC's own practices.

In my view the BBC through the '60s and '70s betrayed public service broadcasting by progressively alienating the potential supporters of the public service ideal both among the audience and among broadcasters.

Let us look at the audience first. If one examines the development of the BBC in the '20s and '30s one can see that the Reithian definition of public service upon which the BBC based its practice was one within which an enlightened political and cultural elite imposed its tastes and views of the world by means of the 'brute force of monopoly' upon a public whose views and tastes were not to be trusted. The structure of Board of Governors and Advisory Committees was one designed to protect and shield the BBC as an institution rather than to act as a conduit of popular views and pressures. It was this elitist practice, also significantly highly centralised in London, that led in part to the early success of ITV. From the start ITV consciously adopted a more populist and less condescending tone in news and political coverage as well as in entertainment and was structured by Sir Robert Fraser, the first Director-General of the Independent Television Authority, on a regional basis as an admitted reaction against the centralised London bias of the BBC's structure.

In the late '50s and early '60s under the leadership of Sir Hugh Greene a new generation of BBC producers, in reaction to ITV, began to break out of the old BBC mould. However, for whatever reason, these initiatives were not pursued. Those groups outside the BBC who, in the more democratic and participatory climate of the late '60s and early '70s, were arguing for a BBC that would open itself fully to the diverse political and cultural currents within the country, that would openly recognise the breakdown of consensus, were actively rebuffed by a bureaucracy that exhibited an extreme arrogance and secretiveness that amounted at times to paranoia. This response included a notable unwillingness to cooperate with academic researchers, however impeccable their credentials, such that the BBC tried to suppress Tom Burns's now classic study,²⁸ which they themselves had originally commissioned. All this was often in marked contrast to an ITV system which, in part because of its diversified centres of power (a federal regional system controlled by a separate and relatively small public bureaucracy in the IBA) always appeared more open and flexible, however little it gave away in fact.

The attitude of the BBC's management to the public was classically expressed by the then Director-General, Sir Charles Curran, in an article in the *Listener* on February 28, 1974, entitled 'The Technocratic

²⁸ Tom Burns, *The BBC: Public Institution and Private World*, London, Macmillan, 1977.

Dilemma: Planning and Consent'. This article discusses the BBC's problems in dealing with the introduction of a new pattern of national radio broadcasting, as proposed in a BBC policy document 'Broadcasting in the Seventies', and the widespread public opposition that these proposals aroused. Curran defines the problem, not as one of responding to public demands or of trying to involve the public in policy formation, but as one of manipulating public opinion to accept a management policy already agreed upon. Another notable example of the BBC's failure to respond to new audience needs and pressures has been its foot-dragging over the introduction of access programming, which remains entirely marginal to its output. One recent example of their obstructionist attitude in this regard was a programme produced by the Campaign Against Racism in the Media. For their programme on the BBC's access slot *Open Door* CARM asked to use BBC archive footage to illustrate their arguments, permission for which was refused.²⁹ The result of this history is a situation where political progressives have increasingly come to see the BBC, partly because it still remains the dominant force within British broadcasting, as the major obstacle to reform and the main target for attack. This in its turn has caused the BBC's defensive paranoia to deepen.

In part the BBC's failure to make common cause with those who wished to preserve the Corporation's public service role by extending it stems from its competitive position *vis-à-vis* the commercial system. The pressures of this competition have led the BBC increasingly to copy the methods of international commercial broadcasting. They have also resulted in the rise to management control within the BBC of a generation of broadcasters for whom this competition is the central experience and who see an alternative practice of public service broadcasting which takes a different view of audience needs and the proper way to serve them, as at best unrealistic or at worst irrelevant.

BBC management have similarly failed in relation to their other potential source of support, broadcasters themselves and the penumbra of associated intellectuals and cultural workers. As an institution the BBC has a long and well documented history of opposition to trade union organisation among its employees. The Ullswater Committee criticised it on this score as early as 1935, a criticism that was repeated by the Beveridge Committee in 1949. As a result the majority of BBC employees were organised in a supine staff association. Over many years this staff association evolved into an independent trade-union, the ABS. But the slowness of the development is shown by the fact that the ABS did not finally affiliate to the TUC until 1966. To this day the BBC still refuses to recognise the ACTT, the major union of film and TV technicians which represents workers in ITV and the film industry. Consistently through the '60s and '70s BBC management took the narrowest and most reactionary line in its relations both with its permanent staff and with freelance writers, directors, etc. Its contracts are highly restrictive and it exerts its dominant power in broadcasting to impose highly unfavourable copyright terms on those writing for it.

²⁹ Carl Gardner and Margaret Henry, 'Racism, Anti-Racism and Access Television: the Making of *Open Door*', *Screen Education* 31, Summer 1979, pp 69-79.

The BBC has always organised its staff on highly hierarchical lines influenced both by military thinking and by class distinction, such that there is a wide divide between gentlemen who produce and manage, and those of lower class such as technicians. That this style has become increasingly unacceptable was marked by the first strike in the history of the ABS in 1969, an experience from which BBC labour relations have in a sense never recovered.

At the same time BBC management continually rebuffed moves among broadcasters for greater worker participation, both in the actual production process by breaking down distinctions within production teams and also in the formulation of general broadcasting policy. This internal opposition came to a head when a significant section of the TV production staff, feeling that their superiors no longer spoke for them in regard to the future shape of British broadcasting, gave independent evidence to the Annan Inquiry. Resistance on the part of management to this internal reform movement was exacerbated by the increasingly heavy-handed imposition of censorship by top programme management. Or perhaps one should rather say that in a general climate in favour of greater worker participation and autonomy the old styles of censorship and editorial control were no longer acceptable.

At the same time the BBC lost the opportunity, partly it is true through lack of resources, but in spite of the urgings of government, to respond fully to demands for greater regional devolution and diversification—a move that could have implanted the BBC more firmly in the life of the community as some at least of the ITV companies undoubtedly are, able to call upon local and regional loyalties unavailable to the BBC. Indeed there are those who would argue that the BBC went in the opposite direction and effectively destroyed what regional autonomy existed, turning the major regional centres into production factories for a London controlled network with little if any independent programming autonomy. Similarly BBC local radio has been tightly controlled from the centre.

In the battle for the hearts and minds of the public over the future of public service broadcasting it is important to stress that the historical practices of supposedly public service institutions, such as the BBC, do not necessarily correspond to the full potential of public service and may indeed, for precise historical reasons, be actively in opposition to the development of those potentials. In particular the BBC over the last 20 years, while competing successfully with its commercial rival for ratings and in terms of productive efficiency (and in part perhaps because of so doing) has become essentially a multi-media conglomerate whose relations with the public and with its workers is no different from, and in some cases may actually be worse than, a commercial company. That it is non-profit making and does not accept advertising revenue (but for how long?) remain important differences. Indeed they remain the basis for its potential as a public service. But it has totally failed to respond to calls made to it by both the public and by broadcasting workers to forge a more participatory, collaborative and democratic relationship which

might truly serve the public by expressing their political and cultural diversity rather than serve the State and associated power elites by transmitting an elitist, authoritarian or manipulative political and cultural message.

I have concentrated attention on the BBC because it is the chief symbol and mould of public service broadcasting in Britain. However, with powerful ideological and political forces now advocating total deregulation, we must not disregard the IBA as an alternative model for public service control of broadcasting. Unfortunately its history has demonstrated similar failures. In its early days it became too much the spokesman for the companies it was supposed to regulate and, as the early history of London Weekend Television demonstrated, was unwilling to use its powers to force companies to keep the programming promises on the basis of which their contracts had been awarded. While, following the criticism of Pilkington, it became more interventionist in scheduling and programming policy, progressive programme makers have not looked to it as their defender against pressure from either commercial interests or the State. In the awarding of radio franchises it has demonstrated a marked lack of sympathy for alternative, more democratic and popular models of control and programming philosophy. But perhaps most important of all it has consistently dragged its feet over opening up either the awarding of franchises or the on-going assessment of the services to proper public scrutiny.

Channel 4: the Freedom to Be Exploited

Perhaps the most dramatic and concrete contemporary result of this history is Channel 4 and it demonstrates all the ambiguities and contradictions of the present situation. On the one hand much of the idealism and energy that went into the campaign that produced Channel 4 as opposed to an ITV2 was undoubtedly inspired by a genuine desire to extend and redefine the practice of public service broadcasting in the stated conviction that both the BBC and the IBA had in important respects failed. To this extent of course the granting of the fourth channel to the IBA, rather than to an Open Broadcasting Authority, was a defeat; but the fact that we didn't simply get ITV2 demonstrates that successful resistance to privatising trends is possible.

On the other hand this idealism and energy led to a result which in the medium to long-term has weakened public service broadcasting because it was based upon a fundamentally flawed analysis of the determinants of cultural production and distribution. It was based upon a notion of cultural freedom as expansion of provision without regard for how this expanded provision was to be funded. More damagingly still it was essentially a broadcasters' campaign for their own 'freedom' based upon a nineteenth-century artisanal model of cultural and intellectual work. The cries of pain from independent producers at the 'interference' and tough contractual terms imposed by Channel 4 already demonstrate that

such a model is incompatible both with the regular flow of product a TV channel requires to hold its audience and with the power that control of a scarce national distribution system necessarily gives. At the same time these producers will discover that by escaping from the relatively protected environment of the BBC and the ITV companies they have obtained the freedom to be exploited on the international market. If it ended there it would be merely a story of individual tragedies, but once a group of producers has rejected the existing model of public service broadcasting in favour of an 'independent' market mode they become a pressure group for the expansion of that market in a desperate attempt to find a viable niche for themselves. They can thus be recruited in the name of 'creative freedom' to support the campaign for the rapid expansion of satellite and cable provision.

In my view the refusal to face the reality of scarcity is at present the greatest general weakness of the socialist movement. Socialism has itself been infected by that ideology of ever expanding choice secreted by the long capitalist boom of the post-war years. The field of media policy is but one sub-set of this more general problem. Thus any socialist response to cable and satellite must be, so far as possible, to oppose expansion and face openly and coherently the inevitable charges of Luddism. The first priority remains, within the bounds of our existing cultural resources, to defend and expand the public sphere. Political imagination and energy must be devoted to changing our existing system of public service broadcasting for the better and to persuading both audiences and broadcasters that only within such a public service structure can a democratic culture be created and sustained. The difficulties facing such a political project should not be under-estimated. My experience on the Labour Party's Media Study Group in recent months has suggested that in the present climate broadcasting workers, or at least their union leaders, will tend to resist any suggestion of change. It is partly in order to enlist their support that priority must be given to defending existing broadcasting institutions against the threat from cable and satellite. This must, of course, include opposing the BBC's satellite plans.

However, the problem runs deeper than that. The non-accountable model of cultural production by a privileged elite presently enshrined in the institutional structures and practices of British broadcasting is deeply entrenched in the consciousness of both the medium's workers and politicians. I never thought I would hear even MPs and activists on the left of the Labour Party arguing, when democratically elected bodies to control broadcasting were proposed, that this was very dangerous because 'the wrong kind of people might be elected'. One can find a parallel to such an attitude in the contempt and lack of sympathy for popular tastes still all too prevalent among supposedly progressive cultural workers in the film and video field.

On the other hand we have also to accept that the steadily increasing privatisation of cultural consumption makes the public itself resistant to participatory models of cultural production and consumption. That the UK at a time of deep recession is the fastest growing market in the world

for video recorders should give us pause for thought. It is clear therefore that much campaigning work needs to be done within the socialist movement to change deeply ingrained attitudes to cultural production and consumption before there is any hope of achieving concrete reforms.

Finally, and this represents the most intractable problem in contemporary cultural politics precisely because culture has for a long time now been conceptualised and indeed experienced on the level of the nation state, a viable international cultural politics must be developed. In this context the New World Information Order must not be thought of as just a North/South issue. The threats and potentialities of satellite broadcasting can only be handled at a transnational level. The French government is active diplomatically to develop the concept and practice of a European public cultural space which would include the public service control of European satellite broadcasting. There are forces both in the European Parliament and Commission, and within the Council of Europe, who recognise the urgent need to create European institutions and regulations which would embody the principle of public service. The media unions are beginning to formulate joint policies. It is extremely important that cultural workers in Britain respond to these initiatives and help to build upon them, if only because Britain, whose media industries represent one of the few areas of economic growth and success on the international market, is likely to be the European launching pad for the assault on the public cultural sphere. Indeed the present government's satellite and cable plans are openly presented as such. If this battle is lost the dispersed corporation will create a dispersed culture in its own image. Within it a certain local autonomy will perhaps be tolerated, but the centres of strategic intelligence and cultural power will be elsewhere.

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¹ cf Jill Forbes,
'French
Resistance', in
*Edinburgh
International
Television Festival
Programme 7 (1982)*
pp 52-55.

SINCE THE SOCIALISTS' election victories last summer, the activities of the new government in France have been followed with great interest in this country, and many observers hope that France will serve as a laboratory for the development of new forms of socialism. The Socialist programme included not simply the promise of economic and administrative reform (nationalisation, decentralisation, increases in public expenditure, job creation), and measures to improve the 'quality of life' (35 hour week, retirement at sixty, five weeks' annual holiday), but also a cultural policy, and it is the latter that has provided journalists in Britain with some welcome relief from the grim pragmatism of monetarist economics. As such, it has probably received a disproportionate amount of coverage. Hence 'France experiments with BBC-style broadcasting', the headline on the *Guardian's* overseas page on August 25, is typical of the items that have peppered the 'quality' press over the past year, while the changes in French television were considered sufficiently interesting to merit a special event at the 1982 Edinburgh TV Festival.¹

But whatever the *Guardian's* view, France is not about to embark on BBC-style broadcasting any more than we are about to acquire a Hollywood-style film industry. Broadcasting in France has now entered a fascinating and critical phase but not primarily or exclusively because the Socialists have introduced measures of liberalisation. The development of media institutions in Europe has been determined by a number of *national* variables: in fact, the national characteristics of European

broadcasting systems are what seem to have allowed the growth of the concept of public service broadcasting which is dominant in Europe but not elsewhere.² It is common to link such systems with the specific nature of the states in which they exist. Thus, among the factors determining how the BBC developed, Raymond Williams includes the character of the British ruling class and the early creation of a 'nationalised' culture which included a predominantly national press.³ Within these same parameters one might thus seek out the determining characteristics of every broadcasting system in Europe. But what is interesting is that all these systems are now entering a period of rapid change and the arrival of the Socialists in France has served to make explicit two questions which, *mutatis mutandis*, might be asked of all Western European systems, and perhaps of no others. These are how far does the system remain national, and to what extent is it predominantly a transmission rather than a production technology.

The 'Nationalisation' of French Communications

In order to understand the changes occurring in French broadcasting, and hence the possible implications for other European broadcasting systems, it is necessary to recall, very rapidly, some of the elements which created the system as it exists at present. The development of a national market and a national culture are usually taken as crucial in this respect. Much is often made of France's economic 'backwardness' under the Third Republic. Pre-War comparisons with Britain, for example, reveal a higher proportion of the population employed on the land, a preponderance of small family firms, a smaller heavy manufacturing sector and a heavily protected domestic market, and most economic historians agree that France industrialised later and less completely than Britain or Germany. Communications are often taken as an indicator of the degree of industrial modernisation. France's railway network was smaller and more recent than that of Britain and Germany. Things did begin to change during the 1930s when the automobile and aircraft industries flourished and the Popular Front invested in the railways,⁴ but the War inevitably put the clock back. Thus until 1940 France remained geographically and economically fragmented and regional identification remained strong.

Successive governments invested much in ideological unification in an attempt to counter such fragmentation. So much so that the two spheres – the economic/industrial and the ideological – were invariably linked explicitly. The best known example remains the educational reform of the Third Republic. Readers of Sartre's autobiography will recall how he was brought up to regard Jules Ferry as a national hero: the ideologues of the early Third Republic set out, through the imposition of universal primary education, to eradicate clericalism and to educate the French into loyalty to the Republic with a view to preventing the return of bonapartist or royalist regimes. But what is also important is that these

² Armand Mattelart and Jean-Marie Piemme, *Télévision: Enjeux sans frontières*, P U de Grenoble, 1980, pp 39-42.

³ cf Raymond Williams *Television Technology and Cultural Form*, London, Fontana 1974, pp 33-34.

⁴ Although an adaptation of a Zola novel, Renoir's *La Bête humaine* testifies to this new interest in the railways.

⁵ G Bruno's *Le Tour de France par deux enfants* (more familiar to students in this country through Godard's television pastiche) is a school textbook aimed at persuading children that the acquisition of skills will restore the integrity of France through the repossession of Alsace and Lorraine.

⁶ See eg Robert Aron *Histoire de Vichy*, Paris, Fayard, 1954, and René Rémond, *La Droite en France*, Paris, Aubier, 1968.

⁷ cf Raymond Williams op cit.

⁸ A less well known instance than the creation of regional TV stations is perhaps the fact that the Germans were only allowed medium wave radio broadcasting. This, it is said, is what encouraged early research into high frequencies in that country. Cf Patrice Flichy, *Les Industries de l'Imaginaire*, P U de Grenoble, 1980, p 57.

⁹ cf for details B Veyenne, *L'Information en France*, Paris, Colin, 1972.

¹⁰ cf Jill Forbes and Richard Nice, 'Pandora's Box', *Media Culture &*

reforms were enacted after a humiliating defeat by the Prussians in 1870, a defeat which the clerical and anti-clerical parties, Republicans and Monarchists alike, attributed to the simultaneous lack of ideological unity and economic strength.⁵

The defeat of France in 1940 took place at the hands of the same major industrial rival: much of what De Gaulle wrote in the 1930s, for example, concerned France's failure to invest adequately in her arms and transport industries. And the reaction was comparable to that of 1870, except that it took place in two stages. First, the Vichy Régime attempted to institute a 'National Revolution' which represented an identification of industrial with ideological force. For example, the family was taken as the locus of moral education and as a model for industrial organisation and labour relations, as a unit of activity and as a disciplinary hierarchy. Vichy, in many respects, distilled a potent current of right-wing thinking in France which held that regional particularism was characteristically French, that the 'nation' was a pernicious modern invention and that democracy spelled defeat.⁶ The second attempt to repair the damage of 1940 took place at the Liberation, and again it involved a combination of industrial regeneration and ideological control. Two points are of importance here. The first is that from this time onwards counter-revolutionary movements disappeared from serious politics in France, undoubtedly because 1944 marked the beginnings of the emergence of a national culture. And this is so despite the 1958 crisis. The press, radio and, later, television succeeded where the education system had failed. The second is the degree of Socialist involvement in this process which, in many respects, created a model for today.

During the immediate post-War period the French communications industry became 'national'. This had already taken place before the War in Britain thanks to the BBC,⁷ while in Germany the occupying forces devoted considerable efforts to preventing the reconstruction of a unified industry of the kind the Nazis had controlled.⁸ The Vichy Régime had already taken control of news and propaganda by substituting a broadcasting monopoly, the *Administration de la Radiodiffusion Nationale*, for the many private operators who had existed previously.⁹ At the Liberation this body was reconstituted as RTF—*Radiodiffusion Télévision Française*—and placed under the direct control of the Minister of Information with a direct grant from the Treasury. Thus a centralised broadcasting system was initially conceived of less as a public service than as a strategic arm of the State¹⁰ and it was, in practice, little more than a government department.¹¹ However, Philip Williams considers that 'means of communication were slow to adapt to the growing "nationalisation" of political influence and moods',¹² and it is in such areas as the press, or indeed the motor industry, that such 'nationalisation' (ideological, economic, or both) first took place.¹³

What happened seems to have been the following: as France was liberated from the south so newspapers ceased publication in accordance with a decree promulgated in Algiers in 1944. Presses, newsprint and paper, all of which were in short supply, were provisionally made over to

Resistance publications and, where none existed (ie in the majority of departments), to new titles. Hence the Liberation achieved a 'revolution in the journalistic balance of power'¹⁴ since in 1939 newspapers which supported radicals and conservatives had a readership of five million as against 1½ million for those supporting Socialists and Communists and in 1944 these figures were reversed. By 1946, however, some permanent solution had to be found, particularly for those titles and those proprietors who had been found not guilty of collaboration but had nevertheless been placed, by temporary dispossession, at a disadvantage.¹⁵ But the then Minister of Information was Gaston Deferre, Socialist, newspaper owner, and present Minister of the Interior, and his *loi Deferre* (May 11 1946) attempted to perpetuate a *status quo* that was favourable to his own party.¹⁶ The *loi Deferre* was not a purely party political instrument: it was also an attempt to prevent concentration, foreign ownership and what has been called the 'notorious venality' of the pre-War Paris press. What is interesting, however, is the Socialists' belief that it was proper to secure domination of the media by one political formation through legislation, and the extent to which their political opponents shared this view.¹⁷ The episode is also significant for the way it illustrates a view of the press, and indeed of other media, purely as a purveyor of political information and opinion. The 1950s saw a shake-out in the communications industry, in France as elsewhere, which ran counter to the thrust of the *loi Deferre* but whose effects French politicians are perhaps only now beginning to understand.

Together with the 'nationalisation' of political issues, the 1950s saw the consolidation of a national market in newspaper publication as much as in anything else. This spelled the death of provincial political fiefs, and it is interesting that one of the most vociferous opponents of the *loi Deferre* was Edouard Herriot, one of the last remaining provincial political barons.¹⁸ The 1950s saw the disappearance of party political publications (*journaux d'opinion*) in large numbers: the MRP's national daily *L'Aube* closed down, the Communist press lost two-thirds of its readership and many titles disappeared, *Combat* was squeezed out, and so on.¹⁹ In the provinces, the watchword was concentration so that by 1958 only ten provincial dailies accounted for nearly half the total readership. Readers in the provinces increasingly had no choice of provincial daily newspaper while the kind of influence attributed to sectarian publications by Simone de Beauvoir in *Les Mandarins* had all but disappeared by the end of the first post-War decade. Moreover, generous subsidies to ensure adequate national distribution of *journaux d'opinion* did nothing to halt the decline in their readership and influence. New-style national publications were taking the place of the old *journaux d'opinion*, the most interesting of which is *L'Express*, visually modelled on *Time Magazine* and purveying to a newly consumerist society the modern wonders of what the French called 'the American way of life'.²⁰ Thus the 1950s were crucial for broadcasting in France, even though technical innovation was slow, because the decade saw the 'nationalisation' of culture and because it established a working model

Society 1979, pp 36-39.

¹¹ cf Alfred Grosser, *La IVe République et sa politique extérieure*, Paris, Colin, 1961, pp 161 sq.

¹² Philip Williams, *Crisis and Compromise Politics in the Fourth Republic*, London, Longmans, 1964, p 62.

¹³ J Pomonti and G Métayer, *La Communication*, Paris, Documentation Française, 1980, pp 27-32, develop an analogy between Renault and television in order to describe the creation of a 'national space' in communications.

¹⁴ Philip Williams loc cit.

¹⁵ See J Motin, *Histoire politique de la presse 1944-49*, Paris, Les 'Bilans hebdomadaires', 1949.

¹⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁷ De Gaulle is said to have wished to ensure that *Le Temps* ceased to appear by fixing the date after which 'collaboration' was said to have taken place a week or so before that newspaper ceased publication. The presses were later

made over to *Le Monde* which De Gaulle intended to be the French newspaper of record.

for the political control of media institutions which was to remain operative until today.

The Development of Television

At this point it is instructive to recall what the younger Mitterrand thought about television. Writing in *L'Express*, a weekly magazine whose modernising persuasion has already been noted, he described television as an 'incomparable means of expression', as a way of associating '300,000 people' (sic) with the coronation of the Queen of England or the investiture of the President of France.²¹ But what really concerned him was the creation of a national, commercially viable, television technology, and he accused successive governments of failure to make the necessary investment to secure this objective. For, as Minister of Information in 1948, Mitterrand had himself taken the first step in this direction by his decision that France would adopt the 819 lines standard and he had hoped that the country would preserve its home market and consolidate its technical superiority as a result.

Mitterrand's hopes were far from being realised, and television developed more slowly in France than in comparable European countries. In 1958, for example, there was still only one TV channel and approximately one million receivers in the country. By 1962 it was estimated that only one quarter of the population had access to television, and real development only came later in that decade: a second channel in 1963, colour in 1967, increased resources through limited brand advertising from 1968, and the completion of the transmission network by 1970.²² This was also a period of great experimentation when the early 'one genre a night' formula was replaced by adventurous programmes that combined quality with great popular appeal.²³

It was also at this time that television became a political issue. In 1956 election candidates appeared on television for the first time, with almost uniformly disastrous results. The only candidate who came off at all well was Pierre Poujade, a success which Roland Barthes attributed to the fact that Poujade was, as it were, able to say to the viewers: 'Look at me, I'm just like you.'²⁴ (Like most intellectuals at the time Barthes considered television an exclusively petty bourgeois or working-class amusement, but this view is not borne out by the class distribution of TV ownership in the 1950s.) But it was really the 1965 Presidential elections, where the Opposition had equal access to television for the first time, and of course the events of May 1968, when many television journalists went on strike in protest against the constraints laid upon them, that brought television into political dispute.²⁵

Setting aside the detail of the political quarrel, many of the difficulties arose from a view of broadcasting which had failed to keep pace with its development as a mass entertainment medium. De Gaulle and the Gaullists, it might be said, took a 'strategic', quasi-militaristic view of radio and television and had invented legal and administrative structures to

¹⁸ J Mottin op cit p 64.

¹⁹ cf *L'Année Politique* (1957) pp 552-553 for a list of titles that had ceased publication since the War.

²⁰ First of the new style illustrated weeklies, *L'Express* supported 'youth' and 'change' and is a good illustration of how political change and the evolution of 'taste' go hand in hand.

²¹ *L'Express* January 2 1954, p 12.

²² cf B Vayenne op cit.

²³ Jacques Thibau, *La Télévision le pouvoir et l'argent*, Paris, Calmann-Lévy, 1973, pp 123-139.

²⁴ Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, London, Paladin, 1973, p 91.

²⁵ See Pierre Vianson-Ponté, *Histoire de la République Gaullienne*, Paris, Fayard, 1971, pp 185 sq.

suit. It is often said that De Gaulle saw television as a means of speaking directly to the electorate, without the intervention of intermediaries, as a means for transmitting 'messages' to the population.²⁶ Television and radio were kept under the tight control of the Ministry of Information (rather than Culture or the Post Office) and were often manipulated. One particularly interesting example is that of the *journal régional*. Incredible as it may seem, there were no regional news programmes on French television before 1963. However, opinion polls consistently showed that viewers were 'dissatisfied with regional coverage', and so the Minister of Information, who at the time was Alain Peyrefitte, announced the creation of a series of regional news bulletins. The response was not good. The provincial press protested at what they thought was unfair competition and the Opposition at what they saw as a blatant electoral move in preparation for a series of elections forthcoming in 1964 and 1965.²⁷ Whatever the truth of the matter, De Gaulle had some reason to believe that the provincial press was oppositional thanks to Defferre's activities in 1946. More important, perhaps, was the calculated bid for the 'peasant vote', historically the key to the return of all right-wing governments. And in its impact on rural France television had, and has, no competition either from the press or from anything except its predecessor the Church.²⁸

This slightly ignominious episode thus serves to confirm the establishment of television's role in French national life and marks the beginning of the end of direct, 'strategic' control of broadcasting. After De Gaulle's retirement in 1969, Valéry Giscard d'Estaing and Jacques Duhamel made it a condition of their support for Pompidou in the Presidential elections that news and current affairs should be 'objective, open and lively'.²⁹ And though a period of liberalisation under Prime Minister Chaban-Delmas (including the abolition of the Ministry of Information) was brought to an end by Pompidou's famous 1972 speech in which he declared that television was 'the voice of France', this was only a temporary reversion to the Gaullist approach. The 1980s will probably prove Pompidou right, but not exactly in the way he imagined.³⁰

The Giscard Reform

Giscard d'Estaing's election as President in 1974 heralded what turns out to have been an extremely significant reform of television (radio was also affected but with less far-reaching results). The reform was denounced by both Left and Right as creeping privatisation – as in a sense it probably was – and a number of motives may be attributed to the architects of the reform. Foremost among these were certainly a desire to break union control over television (the 'lesson' of 1968) and a desire to control the rapidly escalating costs of television production at a time when sources of additional revenue did not appear to be forthcoming. However, the major long-term effect of the changes instituted under Giscard was that a wedge was driven between production and transmission, and it is this

²⁶ René Rémond and Claude Neuschwander, 'Télévision et comportement électoral', in *Revue Française de Science Politique*, 13, pp 325-347.

²⁷ Elisabeth Cazenave, 'Les Quotidiens de province et la naissance des journaux télévisés', in *Les Cahiers de la Communication* 6 (1981), pp 658-672. The circulation of the provincial dailies does not seem to have been affected.

²⁸ Régis Debray, *Teachers, Writers, Celebrities*, London, New Left Books, 1981, describes the 'three ages' of the French intellectual thus: the first works through the university, taking over from the Church towards the end of the nineteenth century; the second exercises influence through writing (cf Sartre) and the third, ie today's intellectuals, through appearances on television.

²⁹ Jacques Thibau op cit, p 17.

³⁰ *ibid* p 21 for the text of Pompidou's speech.

³¹ Details of the reform are discussed by A Suffert, M Souchon and G Meyer, 'Deux ans après la réforme de l'ORTF' in *Projet* 112 (February 1977) pp 172-182 and the various companies are described in *Les Industries Culturelles*, Paris, Documentation Française, 1979, pp 58-91.

³² Michel Souchon, *Petit Ecran, Grand Public*, Paris, Documentation Française, 1980, p 125.

³³ cf A Suffert et al, op cit, pp 183-186.

³⁴ Details in *Les Industries Culturelles* (see footnote 31).

³⁵ cf Michel Souchon, *La Télévision et son public 1974-77*, Paris, Documentation Française, 1978.

that opened the way for the changes in television the Socialists are now proposing.

From 1975 onwards the ORTF (*Office de Radiodiffusion Télévision Française*) ceased to exist. It was split into a number of component parts: first, second and third television channels (TF1, A2, FR3) which became separate companies; *Radio-France*; a research institute, *Institut National de l'Audiovisuel*; a production company, *Société Française de Production*; and a technical and engineering organisation, *Télédiffusion de France*.³¹ Most attention, both at the time and subsequently, has been focused on the television channels – the *sociétés de programme* – whereas it is now becoming apparent that the SFP and TDF were in fact more interesting creations. Each channel was given a *cahier des charges* (public service obligation), a list of the duties laid upon it by the State similar to those the IBA places upon independent television companies in this country. Thus the *cahiers des charges* regulate such questions as how many plays, operas, variety shows etc. must be transmitted each year, and, as Michel Souchon has pointed out, the adoption of this apparently highly flexible system in fact marked a return to the most traditional model of cultural distribution.³² This was perhaps most apparent in the newly created third channel, FR3, which was given a cinémathèque role and began to transmit as many as five feature films a week at prime viewing time. The *sociétés de programme* (channels) also lost their large scale film production facilities (*production lourde*), which were transferred to the SFP from which the *sociétés de programme* were supposed to commission major productions. The SFP, for its part, was to act in thoroughly entrepreneurial fashion, setting up co-productions, seeking outside finance, marketing the finished product.

The content of French television programmes did not improve in the 1970s, partly as a direct result of the reorganisation of the ORTF and partly as a result of outside factors. The 1960s was a great innovative period throughout European television, whereas the 1970s began to see audiences falling, or at best stabilising, and revenue declining in real terms. French television was affected by these changes just as much as British television was. In France the actual number of scheduled hours increased so that it was imperative to contain the cost of programmes. Furthermore, the Giscardian reform had devised a complicated mechanism for the division of the product of the licence fee (on which TF1 relied for up to 40% of its revenue and A2 for 50%)³³ that involved giving a 'mark' for both 'quality' and popularity. Since the two major channels now had to compete for a stable audience, against a third channel showing prime time features, in a situation where an increasing proportion of their revenue derived from advertising,³⁴ it is not difficult to see what the consequences would be. And, inevitably, feature films, repeats and American series filled the schedules,³⁵ and all three channels chased the ratings. The *Rapport Le Tac* (Joël Le Tac is now Director of INA) condemned the increase of 'cheap' programmes such as news and imported series in its statement to Parliament in 1977, while Deputy Fillioud (now Minister of Communications) asked: 'What has replaced

the great programmes that were the glory of French television, the programmes that were the expression of an authentic art, of research and creativity? On the new TV channels, these have been replaced by quiz shows that are often totally idiotic, variety shows without a spark of inventiveness, talking heads and American series ...'.³⁶

So much for the software. But as far as the hardware was concerned, Giscard's reform of television permitted the completion of a process of internationalisation that had been taking place in the electronics industry since the mid 1960s, if not earlier, and which saw television not as strategic in itself but as part of a wider strategic activity. Under De Gaulle, economic policy had been marked by a desire for national independence. This was pursued at a time of economic expansion which was particularly rapid and successful in France. A central plank of this policy was the protection of domestic industries against foreign, and especially American, competition. Thus the French computer industry is jocularly said to owe its existence to De Gaulle's belief in an independent nuclear deterrent and his inability to carry out nuclear tests without the computers that the Americans refused to let him have.³⁷ However, under Giscard d'Estaing a rather different economic approach was adopted, more in keeping with the changed international circumstances of the late sixties and early seventies. It consisted essentially in picking out certain key sectors or industries (such as electronics and telecommunications), and encouraging French firms to enter export markets by means of financial and research alliances with existing multi-national corporations, many of which were American.³⁸

The electrical and electronics industry in France had undergone increasing concentration since the late 1950s and Thomson-CSF, the first French electronics firm of European significance, was created under the aegis of the Paribas financial group in 1967. By an agreement known as the 'electronic Yalta' the French market was divided between Thomson-CSF and the other French giant CGE³⁹ in such a way that each group retained its specialist fields of activity. Thomson, though not a nationalised company at the time, benefited from privileged relations with the ORTF for which it built transmitters, and whereas in the early 1970s many companies which had intended to diversify strongly into software found virtually no market for their subsidiaries,⁴⁰ Thomson successfully coped with the saturation of the market in colour television tubes and sets where it was a leader. Inside France, it broke the 'Yalta' agreement and entered the field of telecommunications in an attempt to cash in on the massive expansion of the infrastructure which took place in the latter half of the decade; outside France, it successfully marketed expertise and equipment in television and telecommunications, particularly to Third World countries. TDF, the 'hardware' company created out of Giscard's reform of television, is Thomson's major client, and with the decision to launch satellites has brought considerable new business and expertise to the company. Until the new Socialist government nationalised both Thomson-CSF and Paribas it can therefore be seen that what looked like a modest attempt at limited privatisation of television under Giscard

³⁶ Quoted in Olivier Barrot, 'La SFP Eloge de la folie', in *Film Echange* 6 (1979), pp 63-72.

³⁷ J Jublin and J-M Quatrepoint, *French Ordinateurs*, Paris, Alain Moreau, 1976.

³⁸ The process and the mechanisms of internationalisation are described in detail in Flichy op cit where detailed organigrammes are also to be found of Thomson, CGE, Paribas etc.

³⁹ J Jublin and J-M Quatrepoint, op cit, pp 46-62.

⁴⁰ Flichy op cit, pp 121-130.

was, at any rate in the technical and technological sphere, internationalisation on a very large scale. And even with nationalisation, the question of TDF's objectives still remains posed. By splitting up the production, programming and transmission functions Giscard's reform took the essential steps towards abolishing the distinction between television and telecommunications, entertainment and information. Subsequently, TDF, with the French Post Office (PTT) created a joint research subsidiary, the CCETT (*Centre Commun d'Etudes de Télévision et de Télécommunication*) and *Antiope*, the French equivalent of Ceefax, is an early result of this collaboration.

Broadcasting under the Socialists

When the Socialists were returned to office in the summer of 1981 the way they handled broadcasting recalled Defferre's approach to newspapers in the 1940s. They had allowed broadcasting to become an election issue and had to some extent (though less than their electoral allies the Communists) provided for a possible failure by denunciations of television and radio 'bias'. As has been seen this is entirely in the French tradition, and even though conventional content analysis has frequently been discredited, it has an undeniable appeal to popular opinion. The key to the transfer of power, the first for nearly 25 years, was in this case considerable movement of personnel, and it only remains to be seen whether the 'purge' will, after subsequent elections, become an instrument of French broadcasting policy.

More interesting, and much more important, are a series of changes embodied in the *loi sur l'audiovisuel* finally adopted on July 27 this year. This comes at the end of lengthy debates inside and outside Parliament and the publication of the recommendations of two commissions, one on broadcasting and one on the cinema.⁴¹ It has been described as running counter to the French tradition discussed above of a strategic view of broadcasting, the use of radio and television as an arm of the State, and the refusal to 'denationalise'. In fact, those measures which apply exclusively to metropolitan France probably do break with the past in this way, but they are not perhaps the most significant aspects of the new law.

First, the Socialists have indeed attempted to change the political control of television and radio. They have created a nine member *Haute Autorité* (High Authority) whose chairwoman has been named as Michèle Cotta, with broad responsibilities ranging from the detection of possible bias and the administration of the right of reply, monitoring quality and ensuring that the various stations respect the *cahiers des charges*, to licensing local radio and television initiatives by public bodies or private companies. Thus the *Haute Autorité* cannot really be compared to the governing body of the BBC since it has broader responsibilities and will function in a completely different national tradition. There is no means of knowing whether this body will have an effective role as a guarantor of quality and impartiality, and the only observation that might initially be

⁴¹ *Rapport de la Commission Moinot sur l'Audiovisuel*, Paris, Documentation Française, 1981; *Rapport de la Commission Bredin sur le cinéma*, Paris, Le Film Français, 1982, published in 1982 by the British Film Institute as *The Bredin Report*, Cf Jill Forbes, 'France/TV/ Socialism', in *Sight & Sound*, Spring 1982, pp 103-105.

made is that its real powers appear to be entirely negative (it can reprimand, it can refuse a licence). This being so, its capacity to influence broadcasting would seem less, in theory and certainly in practice, than those of, for example, the IBA. As a public relations exercise, on the other hand, it is a stunning success.

The Socialists have also attempted to remove the existing, rather artificial, constraints on good programming. The two major *sociétés de programme*, TF1 and A2, will revert to the pre-1975 system of complementarity and have received new responsibilities for minority programming, especially at prime times, and for widening the range of imported material. As well as removing the need to chase the ratings, the ceiling on advertising revenue has also been lifted. It was previously fixed at 25% of all television revenue, generating about 50% of the revenue of both TF1 and A2, and this limit has now been abolished. It will provide some easing of the financial pressure on the major channels, although they will now have to share advertising revenue with FR3, but only in the short term, since other outlets (cable, satellite) will develop in the near future. It is also likely, as a result of a decision to increase the quota of French films on television and massively to increase the cost of screening rights, that more in-house productions will flow from this legislation. Certainly, it will no longer be possible for French TV programmes simply to serve as a means for the ventilation of feature films, though the human and material resources may also be inadequate, or may rapidly become so, for the production of drama, documentaries and other expensive genres.

Finally, the *loi sur l'audiovisuel* is marked by a determination to see broadcasting (both radio and television) integrated into the general orientation of the government's cultural policies on the one hand, and to protect and expand the international viability of the 'hardware' sector on the other. The Socialists have a general policy of decentralisation, administrative, cultural and economic, which only looks far-reaching because the State is highly centralised. Both television and radio have a part to play in fostering regional, local and minority-group identities, and it is particularly important in a country where rural depopulation is a serious problem and where poverty tends to be rural as much as urban. Decentralisation, it should equally be pointed out, also comforts the Socialists' traditional electorate which is to be found in the 'midi rouge', the south and above all the south-west. Thus FR3 will no longer be a 'third channel' but a federation of regional television companies, each of which will be controlled by a regional committee which will also send representatives to a national federation of regional committees.

This implies both that the television infrastructure will be improved (jobs created, studios built and so on) and that some arrangement will be reached with the provincial press on a division of the advertising market. The press will therefore be encouraged to take a central role in these new companies and, indeed, in any private local television stations which, henceforward, the *Haute Autorité* may authorise. In addition, large numbers of local radio stations have been authorised, usually with a range of not more than 20km, and frequently organised by such bodies as

⁴² For details of the work of the Holleaux Commission see *Libération* July 21, 22, 23, 1982.

⁴³ cf *Le Journal du Dimanche* July 18 1982.

⁴⁴ Armand Mattelart and Jean-Marie Piemme op cit, pp 37-49, have a fascinating account of the French government's successive (and failed) attempts to neutralise RTL/CLT by taking it over.

⁴⁵ *Le Monde* July 27 1982.

⁴⁶ cf *Les Industries Culturelles* pp 94-96.

pressure groups, religious or educational organisations, local authorities etc. These stations are non profit-making, they cannot carry advertising, and they are frequently run by amateurs or semi-professionals. Except in Paris, where the Holleaux Commission sat throughout July in an attempt to arbitrate between the different claims on the air-waves, and nevertheless succeeded in offending such groups as the gay rights movement, the attribution of licences has proceeded smoothly and the stations are already on the air.⁴²

Internationally, French television is under considerable pressure. The Socialists have removed responsibility for TDF from the Communications ministry to the Post Office and have continued to press ahead with investment in information technology. In some fields, such as the expansion of the domestic telephone's uses, they have a European lead. But the key to developments is the launch of the Franco-German satellite (TDF1-TV Sat) scheduled for 1985 and the attribution of its third 'spare' channel. In June President Mitterrand announced the creation of a Fourth Channel (of sorts) through the conversion of the old TF1 black and white network which covers 70% of the country, but in a press interview in July Georges Fillioud, Communications Minister, suggested that a fifth, pay-TV, channel might come out of the satellite launch.⁴³ The key to this haste is Luxembourg which will also have a satellite channel. If Luxembourg television beamed into France were to be as successful as it already is in Belgium, or indeed as Radio Luxembourg is now in France, then it might well prove a powerful magnet for advertising and the French system would, in every sense, become impoverished. This, at any rate, is the worst case projection.⁴⁴

Now the French government is entering a round of furious negotiations with other European countries (though Britain at present seems reticent) in an attempt to convince Luxembourg that its plan is not in the long term interest of any European television company. In a recent interview⁴⁵ Jacques Thibau, who leads the negotiations for the French, placed these activities firmly in a European context, hinting that through multi-lateral cooperation with Europe the market could be successfully carved up and a conglomerate created able to withstand American competition. Thibau thus looks forward to the creation of a 'really European audio-visual space'.

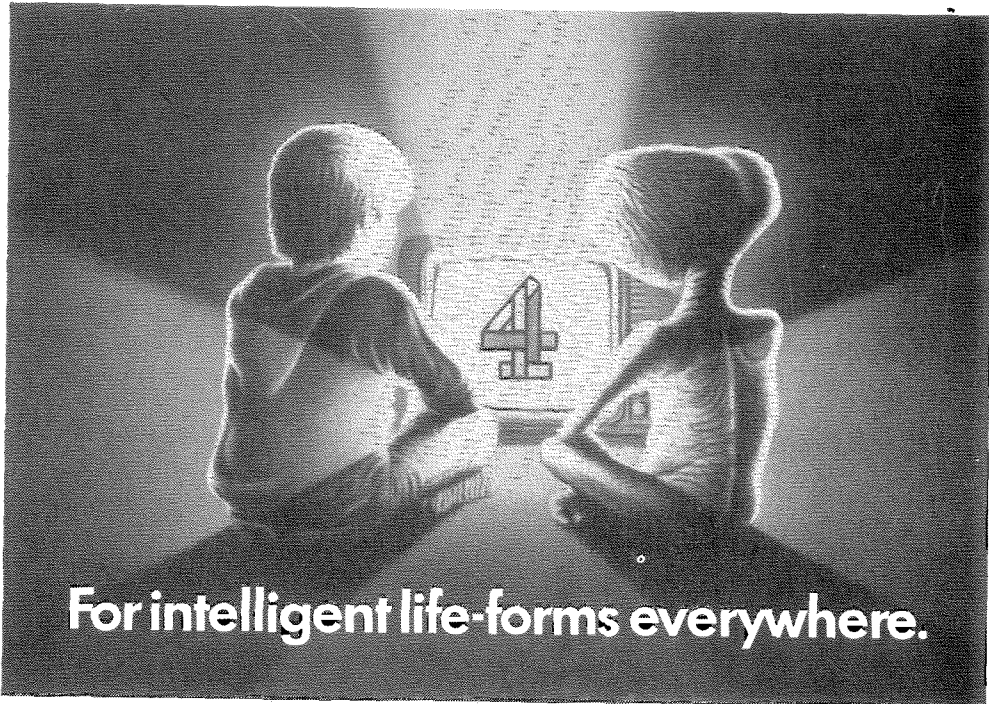
But in the meantime, the French plan to protect the integrity of their national broadcasting system in the traditional way through recourse to standards – in other words by the simultaneous insistence on quality and on technological innovation. The practice has a very long history. As long ago as 1922 the SFR (*Société Française Radio-Electrique*) opted for long-wave broadcasting so as to prevent the import of American wireless sets; after the War, as has been seen, Mitterrand imposed a black and white television standard in France different from that chosen in other European countries in an attempt to protect and stimulate the television industry; in 1967 the French adopted the SECAM colour process (and later exported it successfully) against all rationality except their own; and now they are desperately searching for new forms of protection.⁴⁶ All

that has so far been thought of is an agreement to limit the satellite transmission of foreign material to sub-titled versions of feature films, since dubbed versions are considered too accessible.⁴⁷ But probably the best, and perhaps the only, form of protection would be to improve the standard of the product. France has an extraordinarily rich film archive and the fact that television is impoverished, and that the audience has come to expect a diet of American imports, can be traced back to the way it was handled by the Gaullists, to protectionism in other words, and also to the contempt with which the medium was viewed by both politicians and intellectuals.⁴⁸

The Socialists have some share of responsibility in the present state of French television, and in their determination to remain influential in the international market they run the risk of internationalising venality rather than preserving the national heritage. And it is certainly possible that the price France will pay for her presence in the information technology field, in cable, satellite, telecommunications and all their associated uses, will be the break-up of a national cultural space. The Socialist policy of decentralisation might therefore be thought of as a first, and pre-emptive, move in palliating the worst effects of the disappearance of national television.

⁴⁷ Jacques Thibau in *Le Monde* July 27 1982.

⁴⁸ cf Régis Debray, *Teachers, Writers, Celebrities*, op cit, for a discussion of what he terms the 'mediocracy' engendered by television.



For intelligent life-forms everywhere.

AN 'OMNIBUS' DOSSIER

BY JO SPENCE.

INTRODUCTION AND AFTERWORD BY
SIMON WATNEY.

This dossier concerns an edition of the BBC-1 *Omnibus* series filmed in February and broadcast on November 14, 1982. *Omnibus* is a cultural 'magazine' programme, which has recently attempted to popularise itself by employing front-man Barry Norman, whose reputation was made as a television film critic and commentator. Norman's style of presentation is that of the chat-show host, and the avuncular chat-show 'look', if not its actual format, has been incorporated by the *Omnibus* series.

In its preview the *Radio Times* informed us that 'Lord Lichfield, Jane Bown (*Observer*), Beverley Goodway (*Sun*), educationalist and feminist photographer Jo Spence and surrealist Bob Carlos Clarke were challenged to photograph top model Jilly Johnson in whatever style they thought appropriate'. The

programme planners thus gathered together photographers working in very different institutions: independent fashion photography, 'quality' newspaper photography and portraiture, mass circulation pin-up nude photography, education and the women's movement, and the art market. The differences between the photography produced and reproduced by these institutions were understood solely as an issue of 'style'.

In her contribution Jo Spence attempted to challenge this issue directly, within the format of the programme itself. This dossier was put together to illustrate the problems confronting an oppositional cultural worker operating inside the dominant framework of Culture as conceived by television journalism.

PART I

First approached by researcher who was looking out for photographers suitable for a programme on 'photographic style' – got hold of me by ringing the Arts Council and asking for a 'feminist' photographer. I said that although I was a feminist and a photographer, this by no means constituted anything that could be called a style. Later approached by the director, Bernard Clarke, who explained that each photographer would be offered the same model, could pick their own setting and take any kind of photograph they wished. The BBC would pay expenses for materials, props etc, plus a fee of £150. Was told other photographers would include Lichfield or Snowden (didn't know which at that moment), that they were approaching David Bailey, possibly Jane Bown, and a 'page three' photographer. I said I would like them to choose a model who was a mother so that I could do something on 'motherhood', or 'childcare'. (I later dropped this idea.)

Phone call from Bernard Clarke explaining that they had seen a BBC film in which I had previously appeared, made by the *Arena* team, and that they thought I would be very suitable. Contract arrived for me to sign. I received a sudden phone call that they wished me to be one of the first photographers to be done and that I should tell them what I needed: I decided to shoot in the model's own home and they gave me (for the first time) her name, address and phone number. They confirmed that Lichfield, Bown and Goodway had agreed to do programme and that they were trying to get hold of an 'erotic' photographer. I was beginning to worry about the status of any 'statement' I might make.

I rang the model, Jilly Johnson, and asked if I could come across to meet her and to see her house so that I could choose a location within it. I was greeted by her and her husband, given a drink and made to feel very comfortable (though clearly they were not expecting someone as scruffy or forthright as me). Eventually chose to work in the kitchen and I asked if I could do test black and white and colour shots. Jilly agreed. Tests proved okay – ie exposure, sharpness etc – not great shots but good ‘snapshots’. I rang the BBC and said I was prepared to go ahead whenever they wished and a date in a midweek morning was decided upon.

I dutifully took myself off to Holland Park and presented myself at the front door. From inside I could hear sounds of activity, and from previous experience I realised that the film crew were already set up and about to shoot as the door opened. Which they did – the camera followed me down the hall and into the living room where Jilly was doing a ‘host-ess’ number for everybody. All potentially very glamorous and exciting. Shooting began as I was wired up with a body microphone which I was to wear at all times during shooting. This was without a trailing lead and picked up my voice without room sounds. I worried slightly about this as I wanted to use the toilet!

Jilly asked me what make-up to wear. I told her to wear her normal everyday make-up with a shade more lipstick than usual. I explained that I didn’t want to de-glamorise her, but that I did want to photograph her at the kitchen sink, and gave her a pinny to put on. This was considered hilariously funny all round. (At one point in the early part of the kitchen shooting session I noted a young woman of about 17 dusting the kitchen. Later, when I went upstairs into Jilly’s living room to change films this young woman asked me what I was doing. I explained that I was photographing Jilly as a ‘housewife’. The young woman in her turn explained that she was Jilly’s daily help and that the idea of Jilly in an apron was a scream as she had never seen her do any housework!)

Meanwhile members of the crew who were not at that moment working were thumbing through books of erotic or glamour photography which lay dotted about the living room and commenting on the merits of the women in them. It was hard to concentrate on the technical side of loading my cameras, setting different ASA’s for black and white and colour, trying to remember which camera was which, because another part of me was voyeuristically taking in the process of the production of the film. As I tried to formulate to myself exactly how to proceed to take my shots it hit me that I had walked into a baited trap. I began to feel rather ill and ‘unnatural’ (the director had explained that he wanted me to

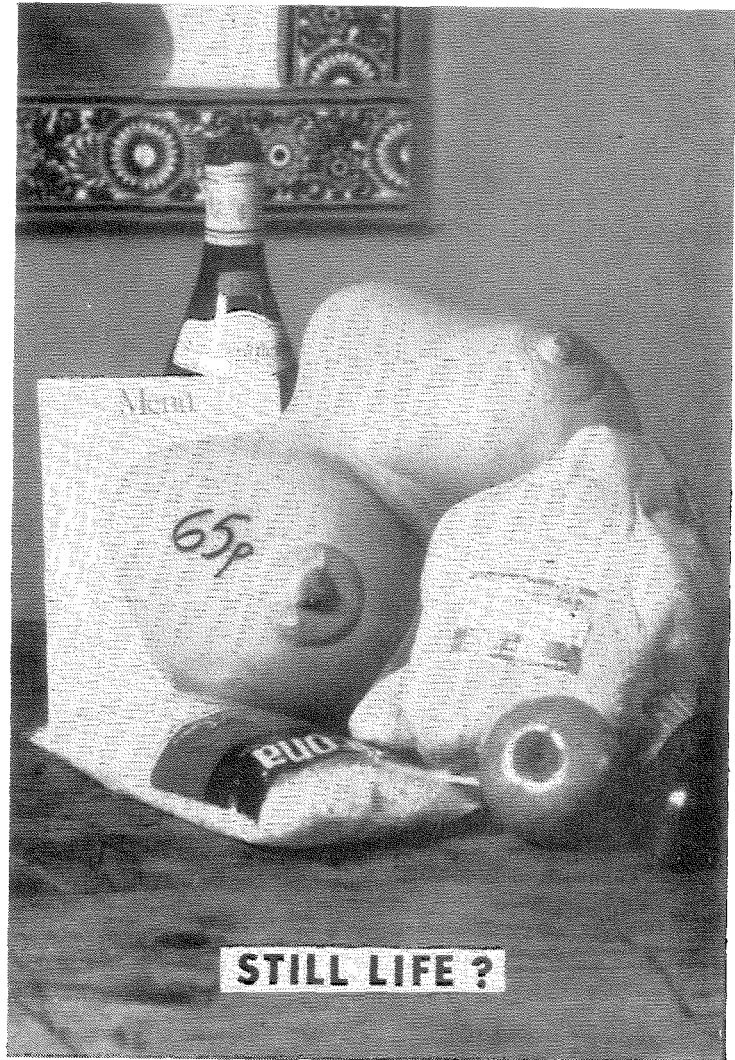
behave as naturally as possible, just do 'my usual routine'). He kept referring to my style as feminist and I realised that I had taken on far more than I could cope with. The terms of the conversation were always couched in talking about 'styles of photography'. I again explained (privately) that if feminism was a style, then presumably fashion photography could be called a fascist style. No response!

I had set myself a three-part task in accepting the brief to be on the programme:

1. I wanted to demonstrate that pictures are constructed – in the sense that two cameras standing side by side could take totally different pictures of the same 'moment' – merely through the use of black and white as opposed to colour film, and through the cropping/framing up, done through different focal lengths of lens.



2. I wanted to shoot an extra shot, after the session had finished with the 'live' model – a still life which I hoped would comment back on the rest of the programme. (Oh to be so naive!) By this I mean that I wanted to do something which would disrupt the normal flow of ideas in a programme around style, and to do this I needed to not use the model provided at all, but something more abstract which would give an indication in a non-naturalistic way of what I felt about the whole idea of the photography of women and their faces/bodies. I wanted to do this in a way which would not *use* the model herself in a way which would upset her, but rather move to a notion of setting something up specially ('radical advertising', as I called it at the time – a comment predictably excluded from the final footage).



3. Finally, when all the prints of the five photographers were on display and we were called back to comment on our work, I would try to talk about the ways in which the context in which a photograph appeared lead to only *certain* meanings being possible (all basic semiology). Additionally, because I wanted to introduce an economic comment on the whole thing, as well as indicating that women's bodies are treated as commodities, I would go to this session armed with information from *Campaign* which would clearly indicate how papers such as the *Sun* and the *Star* advertised *themselves* to industry as a site for advertising, through the use of nude women.



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I realise in retrospect that this was all wildly ambitious, but even so it was totally inadequate. It's impossible to take on something as difficult as this by my/oneself.

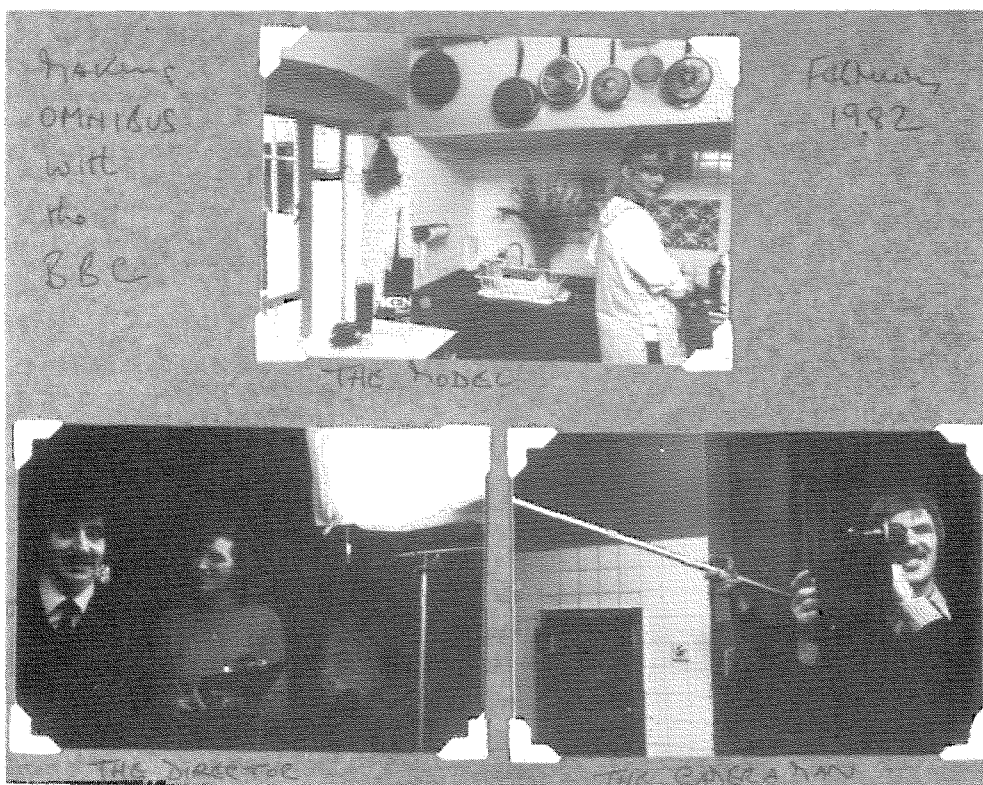
The shooting proceeded in the kitchen with me offering 'real' instructions to Jilly about what to do. I felt she was decidedly uneasy about the whole thing but had to make the best of it, which she did by laughing and joking the whole time, lapsing into a working class accent because she had on an apron and was asked to light up a cigarette. Jokes were made about 'kitchen sink schools of photography'. All very predictable and bearable. However, I could feel my own 'image' of Jilly sliding into something untenable—as I got hotter and hotter, trying slowly to explain what I was doing, so any idea of *cinéma vérité* (anyway a suspect technique) collapsed. At various points in the session the director, hidden behind the lights, would ask pointed questions. This form of shooting is quite clearly an attempt to bring out surprise elements in the scenario, but is quite difficult to negotiate when you know what the technique consists of already. As I was talking I tried to think ahead to what I 'ought' to say (the problems of propagandising), and to how I could explain that this was not 'my' work, but came out of a body of developing ideas. But of course I had overlooked the fact that the programme was in the 'popular arts' slot and that the overall structure of it would finally emerge as a validation of particular notions of an art practice (genius, frantic sessions of work, creativity, expensive artefacts).

I took 36 colour shots (four are reproduced opposite in black and white). When these were finally presented to camera I realised that I had shot thematically (that is, I had followed through certain trains of thought) and I set out these 'thoughts' as far as I could reconstruct them: laying out my proof prints in lines which indicated that some pictures were useless for the purposes taken (the model had her eyes shut, had turned her head etc); that some were marginal (there were slight differences of expression-to choose from); and that some were certainties—either because everything had 'clocked together' in the making of the picture, or (in the case of the dishwashing liquid shot) it was the only one I had done and had somehow 'worked'.



I was aware as shooting proceeded that even if I said 'what I liked', or did 'what I liked', anything could be later edited out, have a voice put over the top, be preceded by a question which wasn't asked at the time, but which would throw my answer into a different light. I was also aware as time went on that it would be impossible for much of what was being shot to be used. However, I had at the back of my mind the fact that it was to be a 50 minute programme, that they were treating the matter 'seriously' and that therefore nothing should be hurried. Little did I know that it would be reduced to 30 minutes to fill a vacant slot in the *Omnibus* schedules and that carefully argued points would be hacked to pieces and butted together again in a kind of frantic collage of ideas in order to make the material fit the time allocated.

When the filming and photography of the first part of the session had finished, purely as an act of bravado (desperation), I asked if I could take some panoramic shots of the production process (which of course would not include myself). This was thought to be very funny and the crew turned off the equipment and allowed me to do it as a kind of indulgence.



I then explained to the director that in order to take the second session I would need to buy some fresh food from the local supermarket and that I would not need Jilly for this. I explained the idea to him and he appeared to be delighted, clapping his hands and saying 'I'd hoped you would come up with something like that'. He explained that going to the supermarket, walking down the street etc would make good bridging shots for the film. I asked did he mean that it would help to narrativise it? (Meanwhile Jilly was asked what she thought of the session: 'Not much'.)

I was then filmed setting up my props and producing my extra shot. As I finished shooting the director said to me, 'I believe that what you are doing is political photography.' I replied yes, 'but with a little p'. I also explained that I was a feminist but also an educationalist, which meant that I used photography to explain to people how photographs 'work', and that such work came from other work which was going on in various parts of the world. This was cut from the programme. (Total time of session: two hours.)

PART II

I was invited to bring the results (developed and printed at SKY colour labs) to a further shooting session at the BBC where all the work would

be pinned up and each photographer asked to comment on their results. We were not to meet each other (thank god). Auntie laid on good hospitality for this occasion – lots of little things on toast and oodles of booze. Publicity stills were taken and each of us was given the ‘big star’ treatment. All as a preamble to our being allowed to say what we liked in order for it later to be hacked to pieces in the cutting room.

PART III

Rather ashamedly, I told about four people that the programme had been made and that there was no scheduled date for viewing yet. I was already beginning to worry about what I had become involved in. I wrote to the BBC and asked specifically that I not be labelled a ‘feminist photographer’ but an ‘educational photographer’ – as a way of avoiding the clichés and stereotypes which I was beginning to realise would emerge from such a programme.

This was all done in February 1982.

PART IV

Late October of the same year: I received a letter from the BBC announcing the transmission date eight days later but my request for a preview was turned down. Clearly by this time it was already in print in the *Radio Times* and the publicity machine was in gear. I realised I had been far too lax in asking for control over what happened – but this had not appeared to be necessary until it was too late.

10.40* Omnibus

with Barry Norman
Lord Lichfield, Jane Bown (*Observer*), Beverley Goodway (*Sun*), educational and feminist photographer Jo Spence and surrealist Bob Carlos Clarke were challenged to photograph top model Jilly Johnson in whatever style they thought appropriate.

A Week in the Country: John Morley, modern pre-Raphaelite, painter of nature and still life, lived in Suffolk when director John Read met him at work in the days before his first London exhibition.

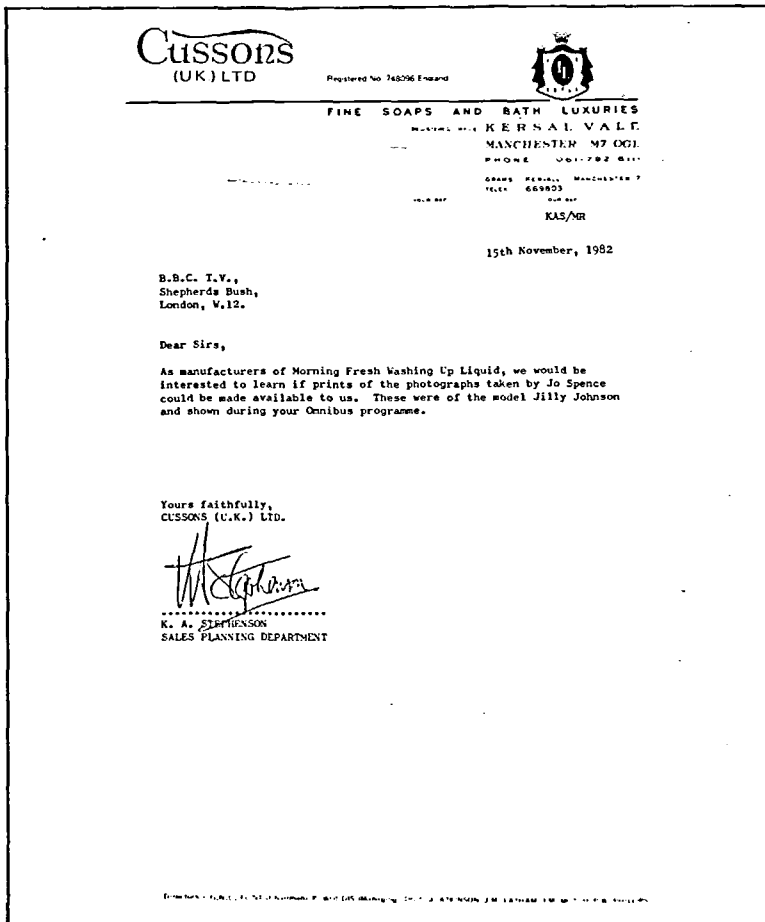
Film cameraman COLIN WALDECK
Film editor JULIAN MILLER
Photography producer BERNARD CLARK
Film cameraman BRIAN HALL
Editor CHRISTOPHER MARTIN

■ Omnibus 10.40-11.30 BBC1.

Jilly Johnson made a name for herself as a ‘Page Three’ bird. Now’s your chance to see the facts behind the figure and the face behind the lens in this ‘Omnibus’ which purports to demystify glamour photography. The recipe is good enough: take five famous photographers and ask them to explain how different photographic styles/techniques affect the presentation of the subject matter. So, Patrick Lichfield, Jane Bown and token politico, Jo Spence, line up their shutters on the delightful Jilly. The audience is treated to half an hour of non stop titillation and voyeuristic delights as Jilly bounces, pouts and poses. Hot stuff, and any attempt made by Jo Spence to suggest that there’s more to a camera than meets the eye are cut short. As a consequence any potentially critical comment on the problems of photographing female flesh are sent to the wall. Objectification, exploitation, commodity fetishism... never heard of it.

In the second part of the programme, John Read talks to modern Pre-Raphaelite painter, John Morley.

Above left, the BBC’s *Radio Times* preview and right, *City Limits*.



AFTERWORD

It is significant that the ways in which photography is presented on TV are still so completely taken up with the notion of the individual photographer/artist, regardless of the site or contractual situation of his or her work. One related aspect is the idea of photographic 'truth' – even when, as in this case, the programme clearly indicated the constructed nature of *all* photographs. The editorial work in the making of the *Omnibus* programme was fairly typical insofar as it suppressed the fact of its own existence, while managing (doubtless unconsciously) to isolate the photographers from the institutions in which they work – fashion, journalism, advertising, education and art – and the discourses which those institutions generate and control. Still less could the programme represent those institutions' interdependence on one another, and the systematic way in which they operate together to validate and organise dominant ideas concerning gender, sexuality, and work.



RACE, THE MEDIA & EDUCATION

The Institute of Education in collaboration with the British Film Institute is organising a series of lectures, symposia and screenings entitled *Race, the Media and Education*.

The aim of this series is to introduce and engage with a range of problems concerning the representation of racial difference in films and television programmes; the work of black British filmmakers; the employment of black people in the media industries. Throughout the series questions about teaching in this area will also be addressed.

The series is organised jointly by the Centre for Multicultural Education and the Department of Educational Media in collaboration with the Education Department of the British Film Institute and in consultation with the Society for Education in Film and Television. The series represents the Centre for Multicultural Education's Spring Term Research Seminars for 1983. Similar series of seminars are run on a wide range of multicultural education topics every term.



Paul Robeson

1: Thursday 13 January 1983
LECTURE: Multi-culturalism, Representation and Education Jim Pines

2: Thursday 20 January 1983
SCREENING: Seeta Aur Ceeta (dir. Ramesh Sippy)

3: Thursday 27 January 1983
LECTURE: Indian Cinema: Entertainment, Escapism, Fantasy Re-examined Behroze Ghady and Rosie Thomas

4: Thursday 3 February 1983
SCREENING: The Proud Valley (dir. Pen Tennyson) 1939

5: Thursday 10 February 1983
LECTURE: Paul Robeson: What Can A Black Star Do? Richard Dyer

6: Thursday 17 February 1983
SCREENING: Extracts from recent Black British Films

7: Thursday 24 February 1983
SYMPOSIUM: Black Film-making, Education and the Community
CHAIR: Jim Pines
SPEAKERS: To be announced

8: Thursday 3 March 1983
SYMPOSIUM: Extracts from recent Black TV Programmes

9: Thursday 10 March 1983
SYMPOSIUM: Four Channels or a New Black Ghetto?
CHAIR: Stuart Hall
SPEAKERS: To be announced

10: Thursday 17 March 1983
SCREENING: Educational materials/programmes - to be announced

11: Thursday 24 March 1983
SYMPOSIUM: Race, the Media and Education
CHAIR: Jagdish Gundara
SPEAKERS: To be announced

All sessions to take place
6.00-8.00 pm

The Nunn Hall, University
of London Institute of
Education, 20 Bedford Way, WC1

A DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE

A DISCUSSION BETWEEN FELICITY OPPE,
PRODUCER OF CHANNEL FOUR'S
RECENT 'ELEVENTH HOUR' SERIES ON
BRITISH INDEPENDENT CINEMA, AND
FILM-MAKER JONATHAN CURLING.

Introduction

TWO YEARS AGO, *Screen* speculated on the institutional future of 'a sector of production that is producing a *different* kind of cinema to the mainstream – different in its aesthetic and political aims, not just in the source of its financing'.¹ That issue also included a demand from the Independent Film-Makers' Association that the Independent Broadcasting Authority should provide support for film and video production units in addition to the then 'monolithic' pattern of project-based funding.²

By autumn 1982, ten such production units (eight financed by the new Fourth Channel, two by the British Film Institute) had been established under the Association of Cinematograph, Television and Allied Technicians' 'Grant-Aided Workshop Production Declaration',³ promulgated in conjunction with Channel Four, the British Film Institute, the English Regional Arts Associations and the Welsh Arts Council.

The Workshop Declaration is basically a trade union agreement, if an extraordinarily far-reaching one. It specifies the pay, conditions and financial structures necessary for possible enfranchisement under it. (As Jonathan Curling notes below, the number of workshops willing to abide by its regulations markedly exceeds the amount of revenue and capital funding available to support them under the Declaration's terms.) These include:

1. 'funding... provided on a totally non-commercial and non-profit distributing basis'.
2. 'all rights in productions... held collectively by staffs'.

¹ Mark Nash, 'Editorial', *Screen* vol 21 no 4, 1980/81, p 5.

² The Independent Film-Makers' Association, 'Channel Four and Innovation', *Screen* vol 21 no 4, 1980/81, p 74.

³ available from the ACTT, 2 Soho Square, London W1.

⁴ *ibid.*

⁵ 'New Independents on Four', available from Channel Four Television, 60 Charlotte Street, London W1.

3. parity salaries based on an index-linked figure of £8,000 per annum.
4. job sharing at pro-rata entitlements, flexible hours between 7.00 and 19.00, paid parental and child care leave for mothers and fathers.
5. a 35-hour week with paid overtime not exceeding 20 hours in any given week.
6. regular employment on one-, two- or three-year contracts, for no less than four members of the ACTT.

The Declaration follows on from the 1978/79 Codes of Practice, concessionary agreements between the ACTT, the BFI Production Departments and the Regional Arts Associations,⁴ which permit flexibility in regard to crewing levels, use of non-union labour and the paying of overtime rates on experimental and non-commercial productions (but not on films 'intended for commercial television or theatric release'). Like the Codes of Practice, the Workshop Declaration is explicitly intended to encourage 'the cultural, social and political contribution made to society by the grant-aided and non-commercial' sector. Moreover, as ACTT Deputy General Secretary Roy Lockett has argued, it explicitly enables the 'cinema of social practice' to seek additional audiences, while challenging the patterns of casualised labour which have prevailed in the industry:

Technicians in the Workshop sector are building new relationships with audiences – antidotes to viewer passivity. They are committed to power sharing behind and in front of camera. They see research, distribution, production and exhibition as integrated. The Declaration reflects this. With adequate annual funding, collective decision making and built-in autonomy from funding sources, they challenge the unemployment, discontinuity, underfunding and creative heart-break which has disfigured the cultural sector and too often characterises the freelance mainstream.⁵

The Workshop Declaration

Felicity Oppé: *The Workshop Declaration has an impact on the politics of independent film as it brings it into a relation with commercial money. But it's an old model, isn't it?*

Jonathan Curling: In a sense it is, as it is a development from the 1979 IFA proposal to Michael Meacher (then Under Secretary of the Board of Trade) – the first of the major documents produced by the IFA which discussed the structural organisation of a nationalised British film industry financed by money from the industry sector. This proposed that workshop, exhibition, distribution, archive, library units would be centered in different regions and financed on a growing scale.

The Meacher proposal was just a plan, but the Workshop Declaration as it is now enshrined and written by the independent film-makers in conjunction with ACTT and in consultation with funding agencies is

a much more concrete formulation of how the relationships between workshops, film-makers and funding bodies operate. It is an agreement which states the minimum funding level, constant wage rates, declarations of non-profit distribution, minimum working numbers in a workshop and, of course, principally the fact that the copyright is always retained exclusively and *in toto* by the production workshop.

One of the crucial things about the Workshop Declaration is the involvement of the union.

By participating in the drawing up of the Workshop Declaration through and with independent film-makers as carried out by the standing committee on independent film, the union has, for the first time ever, recognised the practices that exist in the independent sector. This recognition is shown in that Declaration, and it's shown in the basing of the wage rates on full-time employment for a minimum of four people. This is parity weighting, which means it's possible to produce films more cheaply, but under *standard* agreements which are *not* modifications of existing agreements which had previously been specifically granted to producers in the independent sector.

The role of the ACTT seems ironical: it was the major institution instigating a polarisation of debates around definitions of independence, not just arguments around casualised labour versus stable fully-employed funding. In the independent sector, there have always been questions concerning auteurism and individuality—what control should an independent film-maker have over film and should this be reflected in contractual concessions—and labour relations: process, if you like, versus product.

Why has the ACTT been the initiator for that? The answer is the independent film-makers working as trade unionists within the ACTT to create this at this moment. But their work as trade unionists is definitively formed by work that they and others were doing before under the aegis of the IFA. In the end it's obviously only through the ACTT that you ensure that something is passed. It's not just muscle—it's there that the fundamental relationships exist.

Definitions of Independence

Let's take the definition of independence. Prior to the Workshop Declaration, the independent sector was in a sense self-defining around particular notions of cultural politics which related primarily to the way the text operates. I think you can see a historical shift here: first there was a definition of how the film operated as a text; secondly how it operated as a text in the particular social practice of its circulation and distribution; and thirdly I think it's shifted to the full extent now, so that the independent sector's been defined by the social practice and the text has in a sense disappeared as a term within that definition of independence. It is

the social practice of the production group or production workshop – both in its history (which is partly auteurist, presumably), but also in its declared practice – which has become the guarantee of the position and the cultural politics of the text.

I do worry about the fact that the whole practice of the independent sector has become enshrined within a notion of labour relations, because in a sense it *has* replaced, only temporarily I think, the question of what it is we are making, the question of the text, how it operates, what it means, what it may mean to show it on TV, what it means to show it on cable. Those debates have tended to disappear. They will, I think, substantially reemerge when people take the time off from thinking about the structure to which they have been really committed and think about the material we are working on – film, tape, sound, image, and picture . . . I would not like to see the independent sector defined solely in terms of a contract and a working agreement. It's a necessary concomitant to, but it's not the whole basis of the sector's work.

And I think that relates back to the whole question of auteurism. The term 'auteurism' and 'individuality' have to be completely separated. Just because you're not a franchised workshop does not mean you are automatically therefore an individualist. You have to really look at what those other practices are. Quite clearly one way people operate is based around the notion of one name as opposed to a group practice, which is an auteurism of a sort, but it is an auteurism you are not going to be able to avoid. The basis of everyone's work is that people know what you do, what you're good at, they know what you like, they know how they like relating to you, the work they can do with you, that you can do with them. It's common to everyone. So auteurism has to be identified as something which is much more than that, the promotion of someone as symbol and a guarantee of a certain form of work, of a certain type of film-making, which is endemic within the cinema and also within TV. One of the things that we were discussing earlier is why it is that the more interesting political work on TV has been identified around author's names? It's quite important, I feel, because it serves to protect that work.

Is this a political argument that would go some way towards defining independent film-makers who are not organised around labour relations? Who define themselves as independent in relation to a working through of textual practices and political content?

It wasn't, in a sense, a definably concrete question prior to the Workshop Declaration. Now I think it's very complex because there are a number of workshops and/or production groups which historically have been part of the independent sector and quite important within it, but are not at this moment franchised to work under the Workshop Declaration – and which in many ways have an identical practice to the workshops who are franchised.

Like Bristol, the Leicester Film Collective, the Film Work Group, East Anglia Film Makers Co-op, Lusita Films... The workshops which are franchised at this moment in time are therefore clearly a crucial part of the independent sector, but the independent sector still continues to exist within those practices which are not necessarily at the moment franchised.

It seems to be basically a question of economics rather than a question of definitions.

That's absolutely correct. The definition of the independent sector – if it is accepted that it lies around the Workshop Declaration – is defined by the funding bodies as those who they are prepared to pay to be enfranchised in any particular financial year. In the present financial year this is £650,000 from Channel Four, £130,000 from the BFI Production Board, £40,000 from the regional production fund. Whereas a number of other people working in the independent sector, say with the commissioning budget that Alan Fountain (Channel Four Commissioning Editor for Independent Film) has, or with the regional arts associations and their production budgets, are ineligible for franchise under the Declaration.

In the report-back at the IFA AGM at Liverpool this year you stated: 'It is recognised that the Workshop Declaration operates a definition of the sector – and that the Declaration requires a different contract. The question is then, is it possible to work under the aegis of the Workshop Declaration as opposed to standard ACTT agreements, if the money from Channel Four comes out of commissioning as opposed to workshop budgets? This is a tripartite question: How must the sector organise itself to make this a possibility? How does the ACTT see it working? Will Channel Four accept the conditions? With a fourth rider, how much money will Channel Four be prepared to spend annually under the Declaration?'

Under the Code of Practice, the union does still recognise the Regional Arts Associations as being part of the independent sector, by retaining the term 'grant-aided'. This area does not pose such a problem for the union, because the fantasy can still remain that the Code of Practice is only a concessionary union agreement. In order to sell that product commercially, or show it theatrically one would have to go through a series of union negotiations. This discrepancy becomes more urgent when you consider the question of commissioning money which the great majority of film-makers will be involved with. Do they define themselves as independent film-makers or as working for TV?

The practice of a film-maker is not just film production, but distribution and exhibition. The negotiations around the substantive production contracts for Channel Four are precisely to ensure that we are able to con-

tinue that practice of distribution, exhibition and promotion. In a sense the Channel has recognised that if it is going to have any commitment to the independent sector beyond the Workshop Declaration it has to finance those things by giving us those rights in its contracts with us.

Once that's been said, anyone in their right mind as a film-maker who wants to work independently in the sort of practice we've been talking about would want to work under the Workshop Declaration. Nevertheless, you have to remember the sort of films you can make under it is determined again by the Channel, the BFI or funding body by the size of the grant they give you. That has led to the conception held by certain film-makers that those who work under the Declaration are committed to a certain sort of practice in terms of the films they make. Those outside the workshops may *want* to stay separate precisely because they want to work on films: a) which require budgets higher than at present available under the Declaration, and b) on a working basis which is more fluid than they can work under the Declaration. (Even though under the Declaration it is possible to jobshare and work on other workshops' productions and activities.) It's a financial point and a question of how people want to work.

Channel Four and the BFI

Why do you think that the BFI Production Department should be moving more and more in the direction of a commercial model? What possible advantage against the Workshop Declaration can it be for any independent film-maker working on relatively low budgets to choose to abandon producer's control, choice of their own crew, control over editing, distribution, sharing of distribution income etc, in BFI productions?

You have to distinguish very clearly between the practice of the Fourth Channel as it affects independent sectors through the independent films commissioning editor, and the BFI.

The Channel has now recognised that they will not make any profit from films made by the independent sector. If the rest of the Channel is producing enough money out of the rest of its budget, then the independent sector films going out at 11pm do not need to conform to standard advertising-audience relationships. I think they have recognised that the practice of independent distribution is one which demands effort and commitment, and that there is no financial return from the life of the film outside TV broadcast. They are becoming aware that independent cinema has other requirements than, say, simultaneous cable distribution. If independent cinema has a life outside the Channel, as history has proved, it has to be subsidised and supported in the provision of prints, publicity materials, film transport and so on. If it doesn't receive that support, there's no way those films are going to get distributed.

The BFI Production Department, on the other hand, is clearly committed to something very different, more akin to what the *Film on Four*

series is committed to, which is a form of auteurist cinema based upon a European model of providing a profile within the international film and TV market. It has cut the number of films financed, and increased each of their budgets, which seems to favour a certain type of prestige product. They think this is the logical conclusion of their experiences in the promotion and distribution of independent films. I think the Channel might operate the same idea to a certain extent: advertising the Channel through its *Film on Four* films and working out the relationship between what can be shown in the cinema, and what can be shown on TV. Whether one screening has to go on before another screening and so forth. Tony Smith (director of the BFI and a member of the Channel Four Board) recently asked how independent film and independent producers expect Channel Four to withhold its TV transmission for six months when they will earn less on theatrical revenue than they will be paying in interest payments on the capital. Yet the BFI Production Department have been massively supporting certain projects over and above commercial considerations, and what it's doing now is a response to the historical phantasm of a particular European art scene. Historically, the BFI has built itself up to have a significant staff with substantial overheads in building and equipment with a history which tends to guarantee it a continuing and substantial presence, producing more films a year than most other production companies in Britain, bar Goldcrest.

So in a sense the Production Department is now seen less as a cultural funding institution and more a competing workshop?

That would be one way of seeing it. Although some of the principles of the workshops are not met by the BFI, it could in principle operate as a workshop. That would lead on to the question of what contracts it would have with people who work in and through that workshop. The major difference between the notion of the BFI as a workshop and the other workshops is that it would be absolutely metropolitan centered and would occupy the position which it seems to be choosing for itself as a state funder of art cinema. Although it has a particular form of distribution practice, of exhibition practice, of archive and education which are all things workshops do have, it is clearly positioned within a very different culture. What I then go on to think about is the way in which filmmakers would submit scripts to the BFI workshop to be produced under the Declaration. What would their relationship with the BFI be?

It would be the BFI which would continue to hold the capital resources and retain all the rights in the films under the Declaration, and it would not improve casualisation because people would do a film with the BFI one year and they will be dropped the next year because some other person can come in and do it. People would be hired or fired on a yearly basis, and what's worse at the present moment is that the contracts would guarantee that the person who is employed by them would not have very many rights in the film.

Gaining Control

*The drive for the Workshop Declaration as a form of organisation is control: it asks how does any producer, especially a producer with dicey views in terms of establishment ideas, gain control, keep control and guarantee exhibition or an audience for that film? Channel Four clearly does not answer that as we've seen in their censorship of **The Animals Film**, and there are further problems around censorship and public ownership of certain types of discourses, certain ideas that come up around copyright all the time. How is it envisaged that the question of control can somehow be appropriated and used to its fullest extent by socialists, by activists?*

That's a difficult question. What is always at stake in any working relationship is who has what control over what situation. There's always a contract between a film group, a written one, but also an unwritten contract for a particular practice of film-making. The decisions in any film process have to be made in a collective form whereby there are equal rights, but who has control in the last instance? It is going to be the production group which is answerable for anything which may go wrong, legally or financially, so it must in the end have some sort of control over its contracts with the people it's working with.

In terms of a trade union agreement then, what is the status of that control?

What you have to take into account is money and what money is available. I see the ultimate threat to the spread of the Workshop Declaration as being the refusal of funding institutions to put money into film production, distribution and exhibition under it. They will only continue to do so, if they see certain things coming out of it which they are committed to. Channel Four presumably use some criterion of 'product flow', combined with some rather abstract notions of 'success'. TV has no apparatus for dealing with the way films circulate outside of itself, the cinema has precious little apparatus to deal with it, and getting the idea of the cinema as a social practice into the heads of the funding institutions was a mammoth struggle. So you don't know the criteria by which the funding institutions will decide whether they will or they won't put their money in under the Workshop Declaration.

One of the most important questions is the notion of the workshop sector expanding into a kind of culturally or politically defined entity that could accommodate film-makers who want to use that expertise, to use the capital that has been generated through those workshops. How important is it that the workshops operate as small production companies with very strong relationships to the regions that they're based in? What kind of relationship do any of the workshops have to any other film-makers in terms of potential production houses, providing on a selective basis a means by which they could produce, say, county council material, local women's group material, or whatever? For instance, the work that's been done by some of the workshops

using their form of organisation as an example around local investment in cable, and county council/city council control over that investment? Is that not an area in which you can see the Declaration as being more significant if applied with a more specifically socialist mandate? I'm not using that as an example of ideal practice, but as a way of applying what is basically a piece of trade union negotiation to other areas of trade unionism, one which carries on all those examples about the 'socially useful product', 'the cinema as a social practice'.

It's a freeing of an area of work from the constraints of 'the Cinema' or 'Television', it's separating that off from the traditional practices of the cinema as they are continued and developed by the BFI—which is a cinema institute—and by the Fourth Channel—which is a television channel. But then the question is, again, will cinema and television continue to fund it? That is always the question....

London, November, 1982

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'ON THE AIR'

FRANK ABBOTT DISCUSSES
HIS FILMS ON BROADCASTING
WITH MICK EATON AND STEVE NEALE.



A reconstruction of the first British radio station in *Workers' Playtime*

WORKERS' PLAYTIME is a one hour 16mm film financed by the British Film Institute Production Board and made in Nottingham by Frank Abbott. It is the second in a series about broadcasting titled *On The Air*. The first film, *News and Comment*, was completed in 1978. When this interview was conducted, *Workers' Playtime* was being edited and the sequences were in a state of flux. It's therefore likely that the final order of the sequences in the completed film may differ from that outlined below.

Screen: *Workers' Playtime* is a film about the history of broadcasting in this country – why did you choose that subject?

Frank Abbott: It's the second part of a trilogy of films which started in the mid-seventies. I became aware of a gap opening up between the way I experienced things as an individual and the way those things were transmitted to me through the media . . . political events, demonstrations, and so on. I started to record things from the television and made a sort of diary film about my own life. At the same time, there was a lot of writing coming out about broadcasting and there was another gap in that writing between one's experience of the media and the ways it fits into one's life, and the necessarily academic way in which the media were being analysed. I felt there could be a way of looking at the media which incorporated the experience of watching it.

*But part two of the trilogy, **Workers' Playtime**, doesn't seem to have much of this personal and subjective response in the way that the first part, **News and Comment**, does.*

That's true. Because *Workers' Playtime* is about history, whereas *News and Comment* was about a present situation. People were already informed about the situation, there was a common context of experience the film shared with its audience. But when you're dealing with history, the situation is different. People have different kinds of knowledge and experience about the past. I've experienced it differently. Through research and so on, I've acquired a range of experience and knowledge that the audience hasn't got. So I couldn't immediately launch into a personal response. You have to set up a context of understanding for the audience. Broadcasting itself sometimes tends to deal with its own history in terms of the personal response and history of the audience. But it then tends to produce simply a form of nostalgia. I didn't want to encourage a nostalgic relationship to broadcasting history.

So what particular moments in the history of broadcasting, what particular histories, did you decide were the most significant?

First of all, I had certain things I didn't want to do: there tends to be a rather bureaucratic history already available – the history of large companies, committees, key individuals, important moments like the General Strike, World War II, Suez – when one big institution, the government, comes up against another, the BBC. These moments crystallise trends – like *Yesterday's Men* or the Falklands War. I didn't want to concentrate on those peak bureaucratic moments, but rather on another aspect of broadcasting as a machine for sending voices and images far and wide, a machine for transmission and reception. I wanted to pick certain historical moments that looked at the history of that machine in relation to other forces, and so to put a few different spokes in the wheel, so to speak.

The film starts with the first regular broadcasting station in Britain at Writtle, which was operated by the Marconi Company. The sequence is

treated in such a way as to evoke the conventions of music-hall – I wanted one form of representation to relate to another. One historical moment is represented in a style reminiscent of another contemporary form of representation.

The second moment centres on the actual invention of télévision, John Logie Baird's mechanical television. I use a television documentary style to film this sequence, much of which is an interview with Douglas Pitt, who is a member of the narrow band television association and who builds televisions according to the original Baird specifications. I interview him about this history and raise certain questions about the system and how it is, was and can be used. To most people television is synonymous with massive corporate institutions – it's never had an avant-garde, it's never had an oppositional history, there's never been guerilla television. It's as if there'd only been Hollywood. There's never been the TV equivalent to experimental film, or writing or drama. It's always been massively corporate. So I thought it would be interesting to start with television as produced in somebody's living room, and used in the back garden.

The third moment is an extract from a film by Harry Watt called *BBC DROITWICH*, which was chosen because it's about the workers in the broadcasting station at Droitwich, one of the first major long wave transmitters in the country. It symbolises the arrival of broadcasting as a massive world-linking system in 1936. I show the last four minutes of the film, when the work is completed and the levers are pulled, and people stare hopefully as the whole thing surges into action.

Then the fourth section takes the construction of a personality as its focus. We've seen the machinery and we've seen the work involved. Now we see the construction of a particular broadcasting personality, Wilfred Pickles. The film takes two contrasting histories of Pickles, two contrasting ways in which he could be dealt with and discussed. One consists of a reporter on the streets of Halifax outside Pickles' house, giving a standard show-biz, celebratory biography of this great man of radio. The other consists of an Adult Education lecture: a rather stolid sociological/political analysis is given of the role of Pickles within broadcasting. The two approaches are intercut throughout the sequence to stress the ways in which personality is involved in representation, the ways in which 'personality' is the product of a number of discourses.

Why did you specifically choose Wilfred Pickles?

The War saw the cementing of the institution of radio in an 'independent' position. There was talk at the beginning of the War of radio being taken over by the Ministry of Information. By the end of the War that would have been inconceivable. Pickles is interesting because he spans the period from the War through to the late sixties. His role was to bring ordinary people onto the radio. He was the professional ordinary man, but he also represented ordinary people on the radio. During the War, he began as a newsreader. Brendan Bracken, the Minister of Information,

asked the BBC to invite Pickles to read the news. Various reasons are given as to why he was chosen: people were tired of the BBC Standard Oxford accent, the Nazis would have been unable to mimic a Yorkshire accent had they taken over the BBC, and so on. In general, it is held that the appearance of Pickles, with his accent, was part and parcel of the ideological move towards an image of national unity. Having a working class voice reading the news was an essential component in an attempt to cement the classes, and regions, together. Pickles then performed in music hall. He established his street credibility by going out on the boards and his bureaucratic trustworthiness by reading the news – a flagship job.

Clearly that wartime period was really crucial in renegotiating a relationship between the broadcasting institutions and the country at large. To what extent do you think that set the agenda for the relationship between people of all classes and the institutions of broadcasting after the War had finished?

The War had a tremendous carry-over effect. It also seems to have bred a certain complacency based on the assurance that the BBC could speak for, with, to the people with ease. I don't really have the detailed knowledge to answer that question in full, but I would have thought that Suez, and the introduction of commercial television, were both responsible for breaking the spell.

What comes next in the film?

There follows a vox pop section. An interviewer talks to 'ordinary people' in the street. But the film concentrates on all the things normally excluded from TV. It tries to pinpoint the construction involved in producing an image of the 'person in the street' giving 'spontaneous' answers to questions. The film thus moves the notion of the 'ordinary person' into the present day.

How does this relate to the post-War history of broadcasting?

The necessity to strive for consensus is now, partly for technological reasons, starting to fall away, to become less of a necessity for broadcasting. At the same time, ordinariness can be a very dangerous concept in relation to consumerism, mass unemployment, racism, all the things which have tended to fracture the idea of what an 'ordinary decent British person' would think. The splitting of people into consumer categories: the young, the old, the family, etc, has replaced categories associated with beliefs and ideas. The question is, how does one oppose that politically? Richard Hoggart, for example, in a recent presentation on the TV programme *Did You See?* has said that the BBC is the embodiment of a certain consensus culture and that that culture and that institution must be defended. Otherwise the culture will be swept away by a wave of commercialism and consumerism. But to ask for the BBC to be defended as a

bastion against the development of a consumerist culture is wrong, because it assumes that the BBC had more or less *correctly* embodied the country's consensus culture and will continue to do so. But consensus is a product of struggle, not a fixed entity which an institution has access to. The BBC, not being a notably democratic institution, especially at the present time in the moves towards commercial satellite operations, needs to pragmatically duck and dive to ensure its survival. In the market place, the consensus revolves around commercial rather than cultural criteria.

But the corollary of all this is that a lot of Left critiques of broadcasting have been precisely saying things like 'the people are represented as a homogeneous mass, whereas there exist different racial groups, gender groups, and the like who are not represented or catered for on this notion of consensus.' The irony is that precisely the same categories as the Left are pointing to here are the ones that advertisers require to target their products.

What the Left is asking for, though, is not that there should be a differential targeting of audiences from the same institutions and centres of address, but that people, groups, categories in that sense should be allowed to represent themselves and their own interests. So the difference is to do with access, 'who's addressing whom', 'who's speaking to whom', and so on.

The problem of access then becomes the problem of production, not of consumption. It's no use asking for access and then casting about for ideas about what to put on, or else you'll end up with Superscheme Personal Video Inc who'll turn up and say, 'We'll do you a beautiful little programme about hazards at work; we'll do some interviews with your members and we'll finish up with your General Secretary in his office summing the whole thing up.' This has nothing to do with a culture of production... We have to point to a culture which exists which should feed into the consideration of access, rather than to a theoretical-sociological grouping who ought to have their own half-hour access slot.

Let me give an example in relation to TV coverage of a trade union's national conference. Except for a rather weighty copy of the national newsletter for that particular month, in which all the speeches are published, TV coverage offers the only chance of members seeing and hearing what goes on. Imagine if instead of this current state of affairs the unions said OK, we'll produce our own video of the conference. A tape would be produced and catalogued so that individuals and branches could borrow it, take it home, watch it at meetings, maybe just the sections pertinent to their own particular affairs. On one level you'd get an amazing increase in the amount of information circulating in the union. On another level the unions could take the tape to the BBC and ITV and discuss with them the extracts to be used on the national news and current affairs programmes. It would bring the unions, or whoever, knowledge of the problems faced by broadcasters. There would be more understanding of how broadcasting works.

The implication there is that a lot of the accusations made about media bias arise from a lack of knowledge and experience of how TV programmes are put together. So the media can easily reject the criticisms made.

No, I'm not saying that exactly. The *Bad News* books, for example, were good things to produce. They point to real issues and problems. But the problem with them I find is that there are no ideas as to how things can be changed. What they lead to are further academic exercises, further instances of monitoring – a TUC Committee meets with a BBC Committee – the TUC becomes another shackle for the broadcasters rather than something which at least comes in with knowledge and experience and specific, constructive proposals as to how things can be changed.

It compounds the insularity of the broadcasters, who think they're being attacked on all sides... Let's move on now to the next point in the film.

The fifth point takes in two different moments in time. In a visual sense, it represents today. The images are produced by an electronic camera positioned around a city, continually making a portrait of that city 24 hours a day, a portrait of a society of consumers, of consumers consuming. Where the image of the thirties is of workers working, the image of today is of consumers consuming. Over the sound track in juxtaposition is a section of Pickles' autobiography, where he speaks of his propaganda role during the War. A gap is opened up between the two, a gap which says something, I think, about developments since the War.

The last section is ambiguous, and has to be read in the context of the rest of the film. It consists of a character describing the technology – and the consumer comforts – of an 'ordinary British home in an ordinary British city'. He's left alone at the end with his machines.

Looking back over what you've been saying, two key notions seem to come across: the notion of the consumer, and the notion of consensus. Could you say a little more about these two notions: how you feel they relate to the film, and to broadcasting itself in general.

In a broadcasting system based on a public service ethic, there are pressures, from the legal system, from tradition, from the histories of journalism and public education, to seek a consensus, to struggle for consensus. The obligation placed on broadcasters to make that struggle, to be seen to be looking for consensus, is important. I don't think it's necessarily reactionary. Consensus enables one usually to avoid the most barbarian aspects of the culture. By appealing for consensus one can avoid fascism and racism, for instance. Certainly for the liberal journalist it was a defence against these things. For the Right it was a tiresome obligation. On the other hand, of course, one can become a victim of that consensus at a certain point. It seems to me that mobilising images, strong images, mobilising ideas, is a political process – for instance, the ways in which images of the monarchy are mobilised so as to tie into the political fabric

of people's lives. That's what I mean by the need for a cultural strategy on the Left – the idea of being able to mobilise images in a way which connects with people's lives – but democratically, not in the spurious way the image of the monarchy tends to work. The Left needs to produce strong images of its own, so as to counterpose them to the strong images which the Right hold. The Left tends, I think, to feel outside the cultural life in this country. High culture resides with the Right. Popular culture resides with the commercial people. What lies with the Left? Nostalgia?

Yes, nostalgia for great defeats. But that's also a problem inherent in the notion of consensus because that notion is related at some point to what to the Left is a problem: the State. The Left feels outside the culture because of the way the State is experienced by those of us on the Left as an oppressive force. It's not an easy point of mobilisation.

How do you see the notion of consumption as fitting into issues of broadcasting?

Although the early parts of the film show people building and operating machines, the question is raised immediately. The reason Marconi started broadcasting was that they wanted to sell sets. They saw that people would only buy sets if they could receive something. And so they had to produce something for people to receive – in a sense anything. That's why it was the engineers who operated the initial broadcasting station. They played records, sang songs, performed little plays – initially people were just delighted to receive these voices and sounds from out of the air. So broadcasting is this weird thing. You initially have the impression that broadcasting is an industry without a product. But of course the product is actually an audience willing to buy the sets. So there's a way in which consumption is built in right from the beginning. If you then move to the end of the film, you see this character in his room with his radio, TV, telephone, etc. What is he getting from his sets, all these machines in his room? Well, that's the question really. What's his relationship? Where is his role, beyond being the person who buys the sets? Especially now with advertising and commercialisation, where a lot of the messages which come out of these machines are to do with consuming products.

There's another notion of consumption which has figured in debates about film, especially, over the past decade. It's this notion of the 'passive consumer' of the meanings produced by the film, 'the passive spectator' seduced by the images and sounds of mainstream cinema. It's a notion I've always felt to be oversimplified, inasmuch as any person watching or listening to a programme, film, play or whatever is always actively involved in the construction of meaning, is always thinking about what he or she is listening to or watching. But equally one wants to pinpoint something in the notion in order to differentiate forms and contexts of viewing, forms and contexts of the production of sounds and images, in order to differentiate the types of relationship a viewer or listener may have with these forms. Do you see this idea figuring in your film?

There's an excluded relationship throughout the film. The film starts with these people doing their own broadcasts for the pleasure of broadcasting. There's a collective sense of engagement and pleasure which is then excluded, almost, from the rest of the film. I think the relationship between the work people put into the construction of meaning and the products themselves depends upon the relationship they have to the institutions producing the programmes and films, and upon the relationship they have to the subject matter of those programmes and films. All sorts of variables. The Pickles figure is an attempt to give a mock sense of the relationship between the ordinary person and the institution, Auntie BBC. That enormous bureaucracy. By and large the relationship is absent from the film. Or rather, its absence is part of what the film is trying to focus on and to question.

Your films don't look like conventional television, even though specific reference is made to conventional television, even though minutely detailed parodic versions are produced of familiar televisual forms. The way your films are constructed and put together produces a very different sort of product. Even though the references are familiar to an audience, the way those references are stitched together is unfamiliar. Is there a strategy or ambition that lies behind trying to construct a different audience for your films from the one that television constructs? And if so what sort of audience are you aiming for?

With the previous films I've tended to take them round a lot, fitted them into different contexts with different material to emphasise different aspects of my films or to other films in relationship to them. One of the notions of the film is 'not a total picture'. The films are constantly 'not a total picture'. This isn't the whole story. This sense of not the whole story is part of what people have to bring to the films or go away with. I don't think you can have just one idea of an audience for a film because it's not a manufactured object which is targeted in that sense. What it does have is a number of ways in which it works. It's not a film intended to have an impact on an issue in a straightforward way, but is around and available for a long period of time for people who are working in this area and dealing with ideas in this area. It is intended to become part of a body of work. I hope it will circulate and recirculate. I've really been encouraged by people who've seen *News and Comment* who say they've seen it a number of times in different contexts. *Workers' Playtime* is a film which I hope people will be able to see a number of times by seeing it as part of the story, if you like. I hope it's used as a resource in this way rather than having it simply trotting out its line on the world.

Did you envisage the film as at some point being screened on television? How would you hope it would interact with what was around it? That is another relationship with another kind of audience.

Well *Workers' Playtime* can quite easily be seen just once. Clearly I've thought about it being on television. An important aspect of television is that it performs a certain validating function in relationship to what is broadcast. That may be something one would want to dispute. Nevertheless it would enable one to use it. People would have seen it or heard of it and are more likely to come along to see it at their local film theatre or discussion group. So any TV screening would have that purpose. Which is quite important for a film without any stars or much finance or any real story. Also I'd like to see it on television because it would mean a lot of people being able to see it. I don't think it would disrupt that night's schedules or anything like that. I don't think it would mean that television would never be the same again. I just don't believe that films work like that, changing people's outlooks at a stroke. They can maybe consolidate people's outlooks and ideas. They can move people. They can do all kinds of things. But they can't actually change people.

Workers' Playtime is giving people things to think with, but refusing to offer the fantasy of a total picture. The film is atmospheric in parts. It's not a cool laying out of an academic case. It has humour and surprise, rhythm, pace, colour. But they don't all conspire together towards a final point. Rather they well up and cut across one another. Things go in different directions, not perversely, but so that people can find a position in relationship to them.

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SITUATION COMEDIES...

...AND TELEVISION SITUATIONS, SURVEYED BY PAUL KERR.

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The comedy of conservatism: a scene from the BBC-2 series, *Yes Minister*.

Between them, BFI Publishing and SEFT finally seem to be getting to grips with British television's fictional forms, after a period in which non-fiction programming from *World In Action* and *Panorama* to the news and *Nationwide* attracted most attention. For a while, perhaps, the suggestion that the whole of television's output functioned merely to reproduce the 'novelistic' mode¹ may have helped to postpone any sustained perusal of those programme categories which the medium itself identifies as fictional, any serious analysis of the debts those areas owe to precedents other than prose. Gradually, however, a considerable

body of work has been done to differentiate and define such categories as crime series, classic serials, drama documentaries, soap operas, single plays and situation comedies. The latter category, perhaps the most problematic and least predictable of all (for critics and programme makers alike) has already been the subject of some critical scrutiny in the pages of *Screen*,² and now a BFI dossier³ has been devoted to a collection of essays which consider several recent examples of the form.

A recent retrospective of British, American and

¹ Stephen Heath and Gillian Skirrow, 'Television: A World In Action', *Screen*, Summer 1977, vol 18 no 2, p 15.

² See, for instance, Mick Eaton, 'Television Situation Comedy' *Screen*, Winter 1978/9, vol 19 no 4, pp 61-89.

³ Jim Cook (ed), *Situation Comedy*, British Film Institute Dossier 17, London, 1982.

72 Canadian sit-coms at the Banff International Television Festival, under the title 'Transatlantic Laughs', compared and contrasted a pretty haphazard handful of episodes from the current output of each of those countries. At Banff, the emphasis was on the programmes and it was assumed that the differences between them somehow spoke for themselves; there was, therefore, no attempt to provide a context in which these sit-coms could be discussed. Conversely, the December '82 sit-coms screenings at the National Film Theatre, which this dossier was commissioned to complement, are but one part of a wider endeavour which includes a day school, the dossier itself, and the distribution, via the BFI Film and Video Library, of selected episodes from many of the series under discussion. Thus the very function of this dossier is to ensure that the sit-coms being screened can be seen, by those who are interested, in a well documented intellectual context. Consequently, reviewing this collection of essays on its own invites accusations of a wilful separation of the critical text from its institutional and historical context.

The best response to such a charge is to argue that these essays are themselves excessively text-centred. Even when our attention is directed away from specific situation comedies and the classification of their mechanics towards 'society', a rather athletic leap is often undertaken between that society and its effects on sit-coms, or sit-coms and their effects on society. Jim Cook actually acknowledges this when he admits that 'the most serious omission in the essays (is) any sustained consideration of the television institution and the history of television sit-coms' and further adds that the dossier's focus is perhaps 'primarily formalist in emphasis, although not in implication'.

There are, of course, very good material reasons for such a formal emphasis on so few examples, including the increasingly expensive payments involved in obtaining non-theatrical distribution rights, copyright clearance, and the production of prints and cassettes. But if the experience of 'Transatlantic Laughs' demonstrated anything, it is that it is probably more problematic to analyse single episodes of series or even complete series as if they were discrete texts, than is the case with feature films. Specifically, it raised the question of whether we can continue to consider the conventions, the

politics or the pleasures of the form without reference to the precise perimeters and parameters of their particular television situations. At Banff this became increasingly apparent when different versions of the same programme concept were scheduled back to back – *Stephie and Son* with *Sanford and Son*, *Till Death Do Us Part* with *All In The Family*, *Man About The House* with *Three's Company*. Such comparisons not only reveal something of the respective conventions of British, American and Canadian comedy, but also indicate the differences of production and transmission which help to shape those conventions.

The essays in this dossier deploy a number of different strategies in attempting to avoid such problems. Susan Boyd Bowman and Giles Oakley, for instance, analyse specific series in some detail, while Jim Cook and Terry Lovell consider sit-coms in and against the terms of the realism debate; Barry Curtis, Gillian Swanson and Andrew Medhurst and Lucy Tuck, on the other hand, take a more flexible but rather less focused approach. Tuck and Medhurst argue convincingly that 'too many approaches to popular television have been crippled by varieties of cultural guilt'; too often, they suggest, such approaches have borrowed their criteria from high art, low camp, workerism, populism or simple academic fashion. If their own essay on sex and gender stereotyping treads somewhat familiar ground, their conclusion, that 'we need pleasure as much as we need progressive ideologies and what we need most of all is a politics of pleasure' is a welcome departure from left cultural puritanism. Gillian Swanson's essay on disruption and language considers how dialogue functions through narrative and character to hierarchise the social relations of sit-com (via the 'voicing' of accumulated and appropriate cultural capital). Her analysis of this aspect of the production of power in and by sit-com is at least a step in the direction of Tuck/Medhurst's politics of pleasure, but it is seriously flawed by another variety of 'cultural guilt', that well worn liberal alibi of subversion-seeking, a kind of textual McCarthyism. Jim Cook's essay on narrative, comedy, character and performance avoids such a reductively political approach by both elaborating some formal characteristics and distinctions of sit-com (eg between actor and role, direct address and diegetic comedy) but at the same time foregoing

the formalism of the MacCabean model. Cook emphasises the comic intentions (and consequent generic expectations) of sit-com, concluding that this implicitly problematises the alleged transparency of realist modes and he goes on to cite such formally distinct but equally 'untransparent' comic modes as those deployed by the overblown farce of *Fawlty Towers*, the foregrounded construction of comedy in *Hi-De-Hi* and that epitome of inappropriate settings for comedy, the prison in *Porridge*. I'll concentrate here, however, on what I take to be the two most stimulating essays in the dossier. Ironically, perhaps, it is one of these which, while attempting to avoid the formalism of some of the other essays, best reveals the elision of television's own situation which a simple text/context approach can conceal.

Giles Oakley's excellent analysis of the political discourses deployed by *Yes Minister* begins by observing that in rejecting the outright dismissal of popular culture which was once so commonplace on the Left, we often forget two crucial factors: first, that there are, unfortunately, some 'deeply conservative features of popular culture' and secondly, that culture always exists in 'specific historical contexts'. Oakley carefully locates *Yes Minister* in a network of assumptions about parliamentary politics, the civil service and the public sector, bureaucracy, central government and so on, assumptions which, he argues, can all too easily be accommodated within Thatcherite capitalism. (Indeed, Oakley's analysis of *Yes Minister* recalls Philip Simpson's reminder that *The History Man* was also involuntarily press-ganged into political service on behalf of the cuts, though in education instead of the civil service.⁴ Cue for a sit-com on overmanning and overspending in the health service?) Oakley concludes that *Yes Minister*'s 'removal of history as a process' and of politics as a struggle from the fictional agenda concedes much of the series' undoubted pleasure to the politics of conservatism. This is close to Mick Eaton's observation about the 'timeless nowness of television situations'. Oakley connects this aspect of the series with a contemporary dramatic currency in nostalgia; he does not, however, add

that the series' co-creator, Antony Jay, once worked as editor on the classic current affairs programme, *Tonight*, and also served, throughout the '70s on the Annan Committee on Broadcasting.⁵ Thus this series may have links not only with other comedies, but also with the ideological assumptions of current affairs programmes and their conceptions of the political process.

Terry Lovell's essay is also extremely suggestive: it advances the debate about situation comedies in particular and popular culture in general beyond the familiar complaints about its limited social canvas and stereotyped characters by addressing more directly the form's relation with realism and the concepts of ideology and 'progressiveness'. Arguing that the ingredients of sit-coms fit uneasily into the conventional recipe for realism, Lovell goes on to suggest that

the bar of ideology is not necessarily the only or the best one before which entertainment may be arraigned. (In fact the question might usefully be reversed, so that instead of asking comic forms the question of their ideological credentials, we might ask which ideological structures have generated good comedies.)

This is an important suggestion, though I'm not quite sure how it can be followed up without reconceptualising those 'ideological structures' in more material terms. This might mean reverting to the rather reductive categories of Althusser's ideological state apparatuses which would involve the social settings of sit-com (its situations) like the family, the shop, the school; the formal devices of sit-com (its mechanics, its conventions) as identified in this dossier by Jim Cook and others; and finally, perhaps, the structures of television itself and the role of sit-com in that structure. It is this third aspect which the dossier is silent about. There are a number of observations, however, which do begin to piece together some of the necessary questions and a few of the answers. Lucy Tuck provides an appendix listing a year's sit-coms together with their writer/producer credits (noting the dominance of a very few, very productive teams), the day and time slots in the

⁴ Philip Simpson, 'Presentness Precise': Notes on The History Man', *Screen*, May/June 1982, vol 23 no 1, pp 20-30.

⁵ Gordon Watkins (ed), *Tonight*, British Film Institute Dossier 15, London 1982.

74 schedules which sit-coms occupy and so on. Barry Curtis points to some of the economies of series production, of recurring situations, sets and static casts, and of recording. And Sue Boyd-Bowman's essay on *Hi-De-Hi* looks at that series' relationships with prior series by the same scriptwriters, not in authorial terms but simply in an attempt to specify some of the ways in which that series' humour in particular and television's in general are moving, in the words of her title 'back to camp'.

Channel Four, which will have been launched before this article appears, does not seem likely, on the evidence of previews and press releases, to be meeting its brief of 'innovation' with respect to sit-coms. So far it has acquired a few American series from the 1950s and '60s (though by no means the best: *I Love Lucy*, *The Munsters*

and *Car 54, Where Are You?*—but not *The Dick Van Dyke Show*) and it seems to be avoiding more recent American sit-coms, just as it has more explicitly forsworn American crime series. Thus *Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman*, perhaps the most ambitious and hilarious sit-com from the other side of the Atlantic, has not been taken up from London Weekend Television, where it was dropped after only three or four screenings. Instead there is the usual British output, a social (realist) comedy commissioned from Peter (*To The Manor Born*) Spence and a formally disruptive ('zany') comedy commissioned from the Comedy Strip. And from Thames, Channel Four have acquired a new series of *Shelley*. With little prospect of dramatic change in the sit-com, therefore, this dossier should be able to hold the ground until Cable.

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SCREENING TELEVISION

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JOHN WYVER REFLECTS ON TWO RECENT INITIATIVES

The audience in the main cinema of the Institute of Contemporary Arts on one evening in mid-February 1982 numbered just four. The screening was the first of a month-long season of television material and films linked to the highly-publicised *Police* series on BBC1, and the present writer, who had organised the programme, made up one quarter of the audience. That attendance was the ICA cinema's lowest ever, but the record was swiftly cracked the following night when I was joined by only two others, one of whom had delivered the print we were watching.

On a Saturday afternoon in the same month the Scala Cinema was packed, as it had been on previous occasions, for comparable screenings of television archive material. The Scala's programme, also as on previous occasions, was a selection from the '60s fantasy series *The Avengers* and had been organised in association with the group Wider Television Access (WTVA).

Both occasions were contributions to the opening up of television's past, which for a medium still so commonly described as 'ephemeral' is an obvious prerequisite to a full understanding and awareness of its present and future. The BFI's vital NFT seasons and the broadcasting organisations' on-air reworkings of their histories are other components in this slowly developing process, as is Channel Four's commitment to re-running vintage series (including *The Avengers*). But WTVA's work over the past two and a half years and the ICA's initiative represent two of the most substantial recent attempts to screen television material in a cinema context and for wide, non-specialist audiences. The former has been a modest success, not least for spawning *Primetime*, the only British magazine devoted solely to a serious critical discussion of television. The ICA's season, in contrast, could be seen as a disaster, although audiences did improve and the month included several stimulating discussions. So a comparison of these two approaches is instructive, and both may suggest useful ideas for others beginning to screen television.

Exhibition of television in non-broadcast contexts has effectively been prevented to date by the contractual arrangements with which the medium operates. Drama contracts, for example, specify exactly how the material may be shown, on how many occasions and within what period. Clearly these provisions are important safeguards to prevent over-exploitation by a producing company, but they are also a bar to all other screenings. To facilitate such showings individual contractual clearances must be negotiated with all the creative personnel involved, which may mean discussion of perhaps one hundred separate contracts and possible demands for residual payments. If the screening is free these difficulties are partly avoided, but even then both the producing organisation and those involved in the programme's creation may refuse permission.

Four years ago the British Film Institute finalised an arrangement with the three main broadcasting unions – Equity, the Musician's Union and the ACTT – under which the National Film Theatre may programme an agreed number of hours of British television material without seeking these individual clearances. In 1981 this arrangement, which is obviously crucial for television studies, was extended to the Regional Film Theatres and other cinemas directly funded by the BFI. The ICA's *Nothing But the Truth* season in February, linked to *Police*, then became the first major event to take advantage of this relaxation.

The ICA had long wished to organise a retrospective of the work of Roger Graef and his team, and the transmission of their new *Police* series in early 1982 seemed to offer the perfect link, as well as a rare opportunity to consider a television series as it was being transmitted. After some discussion the ICA's cinema organiser Archie Tait and I decided that, even though it could now be arranged, a simple retrospective was actually a conceptually inadequate complement for *Police*.

There is no strict sense in which Graef can be regarded as an *auteur*, although much writing

76 about the films associated with him constructs him as such. But these films, most of which employ variants on the *vérité* technique, are clearly the results of close collaborations by a tight team. Equally that team's work has to be understood against the development of *vérité* in the United States, Canada and France in the '60s.

Even with the inclusion of context from this period, the framework for an approach to *Police* still seemed too restricted. In advance it was clear that the series would deal with one of the most contentious political issues of its time, and would contribute to one of the most controversial and disparate groups of television representations, that of the police in both 'factual' and 'fictional' forms. So it seemed that by far the most productive context for *Police* could be provided by a large season built up of films and television from these three strands: the work of the Graef team, the historical precursors of their customary form and TV representations of the police.

Such a season also profitably facilitated a shift in the debate about *vérité* from the basis employed in mainstream television criticism. Its 'reality' and the possibility of the film-makers' 'manipulation' were the most common questions asked of *Police*. Against this the polemical purpose of the season was defined in this way:

*Whatever is recorded on celluloid and tape is always the product of various historical and material forces – political, social aesthetic, economic, technological – which construct 'truth' and 'reality' for particular purposes and to particular ends. The viewer then reads this construction in particular ways, shaping and supplementing it according to conventions and prejudices, to arrive at one specific 'truth' or idea of 'reality'... But the question must always be whose reality, by whom was it constructed and for whom is it intended?*¹

The season occupied the ICA's main cinema for three weeks and its smaller cinemathèque for four. Very few of the programmes were repeated and over 60 separate films and television programmes were screened. Each strand

included material from television, theatrically distributed documentaries and feature films. Much of the television had not been publicly shown since its first transmission and apart from the complete extant work of Roger Graef, it included a 1959 Jack Gold film which can lay claim to being the first piece of *vérité* for British television, episodes from *Dixon of Dock Green* and *Z Cars*, together with *Regan*, the pilot for *The Sweeney*. Some of the documentary material was similarly rare, particularly early American *vérité* like *Jane* (1960) and *The Chair* (1962), as well as D A Pennebaker's 280-minute *The Energy War* (1979) which mixes *vérité* coverage of Congressional politics with the narrative techniques of soap opera. In addition there was a sneak preview of the video *vérité* compilation about the rise of the SDP, made by Nick Hart-Williams and Kees Ryniks, which Channel 4 has picked up for future transmission. Given that the programmes also included Chris Marker's *The Spiral* and Cinema Action's *So that you can live*, placed there as critiques of *vérité*, the range was considerable.

In retrospect the season now seems absurdly over-ambitious, but beforehand it appeared coherent and manageable. Throughout its selection the BFI and particularly the BBC were very helpful in tracking down prints and making them available. But requests for certain items once again illustrated how much television history has been irretrievably lost. Even one of the Graef films, part of the enormously controversial *Space Between Words* series, first shown in 1971, now seems to exist no longer in any form. Equally some of the prints supplied were of poor quality, and it became clear that a more rigorous check than usual was advisable when handling BBC material.

In each case the BBC consulted the programme's director or producer for permission to include a work in the season. Only one refused this, saying that he felt his film would be out of place in a selection which, however it had tried to distance itself from this, would inevitably be understood as a celebration of Roger Graef's oeuvre. Otherwise both the Corporation as an institution and individual programme-makers welcomed the season, if only as a validation of their work, and as a small contribution to the legitimization of repeats. The BBC was also particularly helpful in arranging speakers for the accompanying discussions, and it was clear that

¹ John Wyver (ed), *Nothing But the Truth: Cinema Vérité and the Films of the Roger Graef Team*, London, the Institute of Contemporary Arts in conjunction with the British Film Institute, p III.

they were concerned that the material should be considered in an informed way.

The most disappointing aspect of the relationship with the BBC was their refusal, only hours before the screening, of permission to show a selection of rushes from one *Police* episode. The viewing would have offered a unique insight into the working practices of Graef, his co-director Charles Stewart and the camerapersons and editors with whom they regularly work. Although the team were happy to show the rushes, a decision at Controller level within the BBC stopped it, apparently because it was felt to breach the agreement with the Thames Valley police. Instead, Graef and Stewart showed an episode and talked through it, playing and replaying short sections and explaining their reasons behind each cut and camera angle. The discussion technique proved particularly illuminating and is one that could well be used to analyse many other forms of television.

Audience reaction to the season has already been indicated. Certain programmes drew respectable numbers, but there was a dispiriting absence of viewers who wished to engage with the overall structure of the programme or to explore the contrasts and comparisons which were suggested. (This aspect was not aided by a delay in the publication of the dossier, which had been conceived as an integral component, but which only arrived on the final day.) Even more disheartening was the almost total absence of press comment, an odd occurrence given the enormous publicity which *Police* had attracted. But perhaps the saturation coverage given to the opening episodes of the series meant that no further space was available.

Along with confirming the cliché that no one wants to watch documentaries in the cinema, the experience clearly suggests that the season was far too disparate. While conceptually it may have been correct to try and run the three strands together, the result was a lack of focus which only weakened the whole. Equally plain is the recognition that there is no sizeable existing audience for television screened in this way. There may be overlapping fragments of other identifiable audiences, but awareness is minimal of archive material as television history and as context for the medium's present. Any such audience remains to be built, and while there are and will be many components in the process

(including Channel 4, the NFT and possible smaller showings at the ICA or in the regions) one of the most hopeful starting points remains WTTVA.

WTTVA began in early 1980 as a loose association of ten or so writers (including myself), people who worked within the BFI and interested friends. Christopher Wicking and Tise Vahimagi, who had just written *The American Vein* (a listing and study of directors working for American television) were among the founders, as, crucially, was Stephen Woolley, who at that time programmed the Scala Cinema at its old premises in the ex-Other Cinema building (now of course Channel 4).

This group shared a concern with the problems of viewing archive television, and were also frustrated at the BFI's lack of commitment to the medium. The Institute's narrow terms of definition meant that almost all the NFT screenings were of British 'prestige' material (*The World at War*, single plays and drama films). The original intention was to form a small club, rather on the lines of the Gothique Film Society, to obtain and show other sorts of television. And the main stimulus was an NFT season which Christopher Wicking had organised in October 1979. Under the same title as the book which he had co-authored with Tise Vahimagi, this 24-programme celebration of American television included almost all the material that was legitimately available in Britain (and some, as it turned out, that was not). So features like *Duel* and *The Glass House* were shown, which in the States had been made-for-TV movies but which were later released theatrically in Britain. Also screened were films such as *A Gun for Zangara* which was actually two episodes of *The Untouchables* cut together, and a multitude of material (episodes from *Bonanza*, *Sea Hunt* and *I Love Lucy* among others) which had somehow slipped into distributors' catalogues as shorts, often under quite different titles.

After describing the content and intent of the season, Christopher Wicking wrote in his introduction (NFT Programme Booklet, Oct/Nov 1979):

Some of this may, frankly, be less than brilliant (if necessary to get true perspectives.) Mainly though this will be a lot of fun – and, even better, we hope we will open up doors as well as minds, that

78 *copyright and royalty problems will be solved and that a much more purposefully selected season can be mounted, once TV executives and unions recognise that their work has more value than the merely commercial.*

The showings were successful, and even packed NFTI for two *Outer Limits* episodes well before the BBC re-ran the series. But one unfortunate effect was that it alerted production companies to material which was illegitimately in distribution and several prints had to be withdrawn and destroyed.

The organisation of a group to continue with similar showings was the obvious next step, but the involvement with the Scala led to a much more public profile than had originally been envisaged. Plans were made for regular showings and WTVA announced its formation in June 1980 with a press release (of which the following is an extract):

Forty years of culture lies locked away in forgotten film stores and inaccessible to audiences. Countless hours of television history, each one watched by millions, are now dumped in vaults and seen by no one.

WTVA (Wider Television Access) exists to open those vaults. It aims to make television's past widely available, both for nostalgic pleasure and for discussion and much needed documentation.

WTVA wishes to illustrate that the work which survives has the same vital interest today as literature and cinema's history. So WTVA wishes to stimulate critical awareness and understanding of these programmes, to catalogue the works of directors, chronicle the history of studios and chart the rise of genres...

That such screenings do not occur at present is partly because of complex copyright questions, which WTVA hopes to tackle, and partly because of lack of commitment within organisations like the BFI. Another contributory reason is that almost all distributors and exhibitors believe that no one is interested in 'old TV'. If it can be shown that a sizable committed and knowledgeable audience exists for such material then WTVA believes that some of the problems can be overcome and more screenings stimulated.

The first programme, which featured some of the Hitchcock material from the NFT season, drew a disappointingly small audience (other later repeats, like *The Outer Limits* and *The Untouchables* were far more successful). Almost by chance the second WTVA event hit on *The*

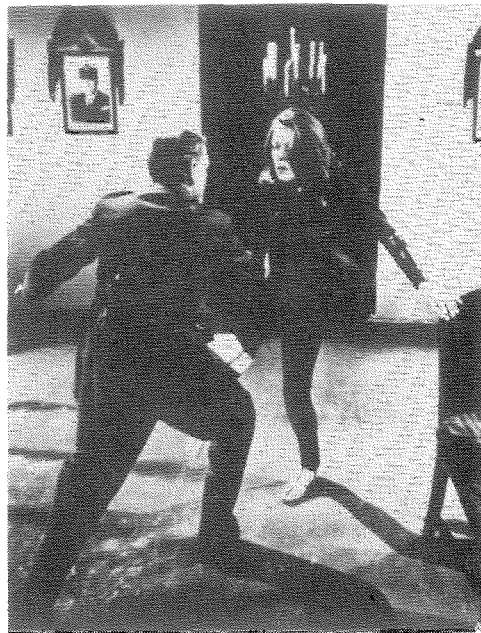
Avengers, which the organising committee suspected would be exceptionally popular. A combination of different contractual arrangements and fortuitous goodwill from the distributing television company meant that episodes could be shown under the membership conditions of WTVA.

The Avengers almost filled the Scala on its first outing and the series has remained at the core of WTVA's screenings ever since. Approximately half of the events so far have included episodes from the series and it has remained a strong draw for audiences. Later programmes (all of which have been organised in conjunction with the Scala, and recently at its new premises in King's Cross) have included *Danger Man* and two complete runs of *The Prisoner*, wide selections of television science fiction, and mixed programmes of television rock and pop from the '60s.

Fantasy has thus remained the dominant note of the screenings, which have drawn on the Scala's already well-established audience for this genre. Indeed it must be recognised that the building of a WTVA audience for archive television as such is still at a very early stage. WTVA's real success has come from exploiting this pre-existing audience and the cinema's equally well established rock fans.

Audience response has obviously been critical in the planning of screenings, while the other two determining factors have been the personal enthusiasms of the organising committee and the straightforward availability of material. WTVA soon found that, for British television, *The Avengers*, *Danger Man* and *The Prisoner* were exceptional and that almost all other shows were, as had been anticipated, unobtainable. The range has thus remained highly restricted. Even so, attempts have been made to widen that; two of Fassbinder's television works, for example, have been presented to audiences of a respectable size. Prints from private collectors have also been made available, and shown in small screenings, advertised only by word of mouth.

Admission to the main events is on either a daily or an annual membership basis, and WTVA has almost 1000 annual members who receive a monthly sheet with details of the next programme. The economics are such that WTVA has been self-financing, with takings at *The Avengers* and *The Prisoner* being sufficient to subsidise smaller events and the publication of *Primetime*.



Scenes from *The Avengers*, the British '60s series at the core of WTV's success.

Along with screenings, another of WTV's original aims was the mounting of discussions about television, but it is one that it has yet to fulfil. Members of the production teams of both *The Avengers* and *The Prisoner*, however, have been pleased to come to showings, to introduce their work, and to answer questions.

'WTV also has the task of persuasion' read the first press release, and the group has co-ordinated the writing of a number of newspaper and magazine articles arguing for television to be taken more seriously and for wider access to its history. Late in 1980 it produced a short 'access' spot on *Look Here*, LWT's magazine series about television, to put these points across.

More recently it has been involved in lengthy and ultimately fruitless discussions with Channel 4 about the possibility of planning and co-ordinating part of their archival output, and of organising related material in *Primetime*. Similar ideas, although on a more modest scale, are now being considered by the BBC. In addition to this work, individual WTV members have had talks with production and distribution company representatives, and with union officials, to further the group's aims. These lobbying efforts do seem to be opening up cracks of access, to both information and to prints.

In July 1981 WTV launched *Primetime*, 'a regular and serious magazine about television'. Three issues have been produced, a fourth is about to emerge from the printers and the copy for a fifth is now being edited. Fifteen hundred copies of each edition were printed, most of which have been sold at the Scala, the NFT bookshop and a handful of other distribution points for £1 a copy.

Issue one included a substantial essay about the history of television cop shows and an interview with scriptwriter Richard Matheson. A checklist of episodes of *The Avengers* (continued in issue two) and network schedule charts from 1961 were compiled and printed, alongside discussions of commercials, copyright and an essay on popular television by Raymond Durgnat. British television features more heavily in issue two, with considerations of *The Professionals*, documentary makers Jana Bokova, Michael Whyte and Mike Grigsby, the comedy of Joe McGrath and Mike Leigh's dramas. The third issue carried pieces on *The Prisoner*, *Rawhide* and *Knots Landing*.

The magazine is a substantial achievement, yet it has still to achieve wide distribution or recognition. Greater co-ordination with screenings is planned, as is a broadening of the

80 subjects covered (issue five will be devoted to the development of BBC2).

Primetime will remain one of WTV's priorities; the other must be a concerted campaign to try to obtain a similar agreement for WTV with the British unions as that with which the BFI is favoured. WTV would ideally like to show as wide a variety of material as that included in the ICA season, and to survive and

grow it must find ways to do so. Re-runs of *The Avengers*, however important and popular, cannot keep it alive for ever.

Inquiries about WTV membership to the Scala Cinema, 275/277 Pentonville Road, London NW1. *Primetime* subscriptions £4.50 for four issues.



PRIMETIME
MAGAZINE
Number 4, Autumn 1982

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CINEMATIC COMPARISONS

GILES OAKLEY REVIEWS A
NEW STUDY OF FILM AND TELEVISION.

81

It is a curious feature of contemporary criticism that cinema, itself once the subject of scorn and condescension, now carries with it a weight of cultural prestige that is still denied television. Cinema has drawn to itself a range of committed supporters that seems to grow in inverse proportion to the numbers of people actually paying at the box-office. Not only are there 'movie-buffs' but also 'cinéphiles' (a sure sign of status that, a foreign derived term), and an impressive infrastructure of institutional support from the British Film Institute and other bodies. When it comes to books, journals and magazines, again it is cinema, not television, that generates most activity.

At a more serious level cinema has led to the creation of 'Film Theory' that has no real equivalent in television. Just as there are only a few self-styled 'TV buffs', and there are absolutely no 'TV-philes', there is, as yet, no 'TV theory'. Indeed TV criticism has hardly developed beyond the anecdotal response and the whimsical personal reaction.

Such serious engagement as there has been with the issues of form, structure and politics of television have mainly come from a sociological starting point, spreading into the growing field of Media Studies, an all embracing category which, so far, lacks the status of cinema. However the growing recognition of the key ideological role played by television is now pushing more people into serious consideration of television-as-form, as opposed to the older types of sociological 'effects' research. For someone like myself, professionally involved in programme making, this development is welcome, even though that has not always been the case for those patrolling the commanding

heights of broadcasting. Regrettably, the gradual assembling of what may eventually emerge as TV theory is usually savaged inside the broadcasting institutions as 'airy fairy' – the term used by a regular columnist in the BBC staff journal *Ariel* to dismiss critical approaches based on Marxism, semiology or structuralism.

In the current ideological volatility of British society the felt institutional need to resist and beat down the work of critics like the Glasgow Media Group has led to a habitual rejection of virtually *all* 'theory'. In practice this means an immense hostility to reflection on the forms and aesthetics of day-to-day broadcasting, the taken-for-granted assumptions about what makes 'good telly'. Inevitably – no, not inevitably – certainly, this has meant a deepening conservatism, embodied at the top of the TV institutions and gradually permeating through the system.

There are of course exceptions to this, pockets of resistance, points of often instinctive opposition. It is sad to report, however, that, taking the BBC, many of the people most likely to be responsive to a book like *Visible Fictions*¹ have already gone, in search of postures new, to Channel 4. Indeed the book's author is now himself professionally involved in broadcasting for the new Channel. As a director of Large Door Productions John Ellis is helping to produce a fifteen-programme film magazine series for a Wednesday late-night slot. Large Door was set up specifically for this Channel 4 production as a subsidiary of the independent film-makers' co-operative Spectre Productions.

¹ John Ellis, *Visible Fictions: Cinema, Television, Video*, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982.

Something of the conceptual approach that Ellis brings to bear on *Visible Fictions* can be gleaned from his most substantial work to date, *Language and Materialism: Developments in Semiology and the Theory of the Subject* (1977), written jointly with Rosalind Coward. Inevitably that was a dense and demanding book, and it implies no disrespect for it to say that it came as something of a relief to find *Visible Fictions* much more accessible and easy to read.

This new book is mainly an examination of cinema and television, separately and in comparison with each other. (The inclusion of video in the subtitle is a mite misleading in this respect.) In his own words he has taken 'what is now a relatively tried and tested conception of cinema, developed from an initial semiotic approach to cinema in the early 1970s [to see] how it fitted my perception of broadcast TV'.

It is clear from the beginning that Ellis is far happier writing about cinema, for he acknowledges the substantial gaps in his knowledge of television and the particular bias expressed in the use of photographic illustrations solely from cinema. Similarly the list of cinema films referred to is twice as long as that for TV productions. There is throughout an ease of manner when Ellis is quoting examples from movies which becomes more halting when he cites TV programmes (except, interestingly, when he refers to ones which have been screened at the National Film Theatre).

Early in the book he refers to his own personal background, including going to a boarding school 'whose notion of education included a savage deprivation of all electronic media'. His involvement in watching audio-visual material became closely linked with 'pleasure and its prohibition, and with the demands of the super-ego that such pleasures should be analysed in a socially useful way'. One has the feeling that this puritanical requirement, not untypical of his class background, is more easily fulfilled when he is dealing with cinema, with all its markers of cultural respectability (including the necessity that you *go out* to the cinema rather than just slump in front of the box at home, with its associations of passivity and laziness).

So despite John Ellis's intention of giving serious consideration to TV it still comes over as the poor relation, for with him it is best seen *in relation* to cinema rather than in its own terms. There is an (again acknowledged) tendency to see TV through the eyes of cinema, as though cinema representations themselves are guarantors of truth. For example he refers to *Adieu Philippine* (1962) which contains 'several sequences illustrating forms of live TV broadcasting . . . It shows the director as a lonely and irascible figure, cut off from the activity of the stage, having very little control over the finished programme.' He then argues that the way studios are organised, with their division between floor and gallery 'represents the total

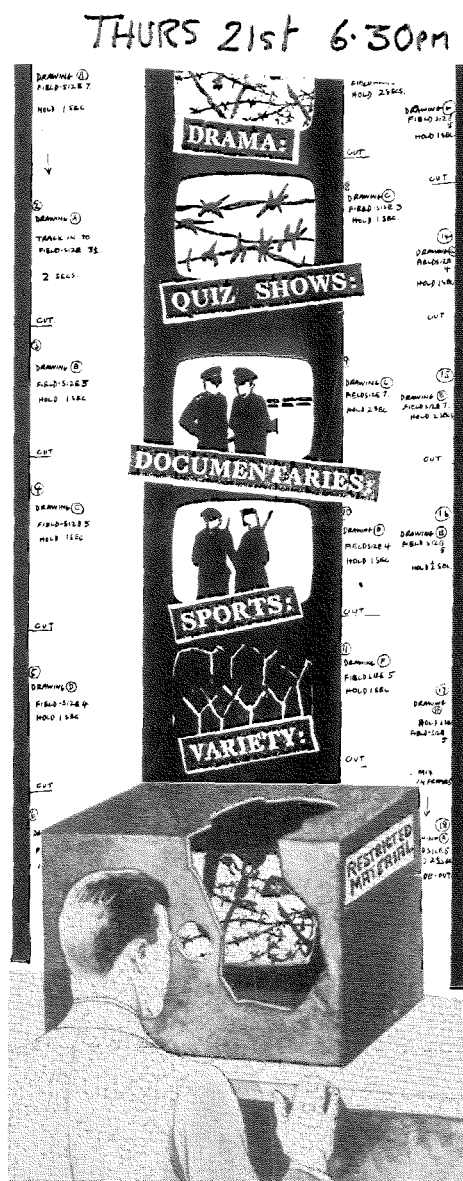


automatisation of the aesthetic level of the programme. There is no scope for the use of cameras in any out-of-the-ordinary way.' It will be interesting to see if Ellis really finds that to be true in his work for Channel 4.

Despite Ellis's greater ease when dealing with cinema, in part a function of the larger body of literature on the subject, one should not lose sight of what he is saying. Regarding cinema and broadcast TV as divergent and complementary, he tries to produce a coherent overall description of both as aesthetic and economic institutions. Part One of the Book, 'Cinema', is probably the most satisfactory from this point of view, with chapters on cinema as 'Cultural event', as 'Image and sound', on cinema narration, the spectator and on Stars. Some of this material will be familiar to the diligent *Screen* reader, but this is a lucid over-view, a survey which I am sure I will often turn to for reference. For example his dissection of cinematic voyeurism and fetishism will be of great use to someone lacking a detailed knowledge of psychoanalytical approaches to cinema. He skilfully deploys concepts formulated elsewhere, like Roland Barthes' notion of the 'photo effect', the 'present absence', the 'this-is-was' nature of film which gives it its potency. In a key point for his argument on television he shows how the photo effect pushes film into a 'historic mode' of narration:

The spectator is the point of intelligibility in relation to the narrative unfolding of a story that *must*, being on film, have happened in the past. The narration appears agentless, as though events tell themselves through the neutral mechanism of the narrative. There is a drive towards resolution of the initial enigma set up by the film's 'narrative image'. A term created by Stephen Heath, this is the promise created by the advertising and marketing of a film. In 'classic Hollywood' cinema the spectator is ultimately given more or less satisfactory totalising vision of the film through its narrative construction; indeed it is for the spectator's benefit that it happens.

Ellis contrasts this with the dominance of the serial form of TV where the narration is merely an accumulation of 'segments' in an open-ended, continuous update, a perpetual return to the present. He is particularly good on how these qualities transcend categories of fiction and non-fiction. He shows how news and current affairs strategies are remarkably similar to soap operas,



where viewers are continually brought up to date in a story which appears to be continuing outside the agency of television – as though the viewer tunes in to something which is happening anyway.

The powerful sense of immediacy that TV creates – even with *recorded* programmes – through direct address ('... and here to bring us up to date on...') and the implicit claim to be

'live', is in marked contrast to the historic mode of cinema. The dominance of series and serial forms – news, soaps, current affairs, sport, dramas – wherein so many narratives *never* come to a point of closure or totalising vision for the spectator – constitute a defining characteristic of TV.

Ellis's strategy of comparison between cinema and TV is at its most satisfactory on topics like this. The book is also persuasive in discussing the spectator's intense gaze at the cinema screen compared with the almost casual *glance* of the TV viewer. This leads to important insights about the dominance of *sound* in TV (voice overs, presenters, etc.) rather than *image* as in the cinema. The TV image is seldom held for more or less than the time it takes for the information it contains to be absorbed. Ambiguity of image is rare and images are seldom used for their own sake, but to reinforce, amplify or parallel ideas carried in words.

Questions raised about sound and image in this way are useful – not necessarily because they are new, but because in the normal course of events such issues are not often considered by broadcasters themselves. There is little encouragement inside the BBC to consider aesthetics of this kind or their ideological implications.

Although Ellis under-rates or ignores the importance of connections between TV and other media apart from his beloved cinema, it is ultimately the ideological questions he sketches in that are more important than how he arrives at them. (For instance he hardly mentions radio which provided many forerunners of forms now found in TV but not found in cinema at all, such as situation comedy and the news. And television news is of course even more heavily shaped by concepts of newsworthiness and authoritative sources drawn from print media.)

Ellis frequently refers to the aesthetic and political conservatism of TV, relating it to technical/economic features like its increasingly industrial, production-line structure, as well as its characteristics as a medium. Drawing on arguments which have gained ground in political as well as academic circles, but which are emphatically denied or misunderstood by the TV institutions, he attacks the dominance of the consensus view of reality constructed by TV. Showing how this consensus creates 'in' and 'out' groups, 'moderates' and 'extremists' and so

on, Ellis tries to relate these tendencies to those features of TV which are different from cinema.

One of these features is the presumed requirement of broadcast TV that it maintain maximum intelligibility for a mass, national audience. This has an in-built tendency to create a sense of complicity between viewer and TV institution, a sharing of what 'we' all know, as TV explains and interprets the world 'outside' from its assumed position of detachment. But a mode of address which is supposedly comprehensible to as many people as possible implies a language of shared and therefore dominant ideology.

Ellis's notion of ideology to some extent sidesteps debates about what the word means. He sees it primarily as a process, something that continually changes, adapts and regenerates itself. TV programmes represent part of the terrain over which the to-and-fro of ideological struggle can be seen to take place, and it is against this background that the notion of maximum intelligibility should be seen.

Given the infusion into Channel 4 of people rejecting the doctrine of maximum comprehensibility it will be interesting to see how effective their challenge to consensus television is. How many of the New Practitioners will eventually opt for the 'normal' modes of

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address with the consequent dangers of accepting the limiting construction of 'normality' that goes with them? Will they manage to disrupt or undermine those dominant modes, the visual, linguistic and stylistic conventions which so quickly get absorbed by a kind of professionalising osmosis? The assumptions about speaking to a potentially national audience are very quickly accepted, especially by people under institutional pressure to increase audience size and ratings success. People used to watching TV on a very limited number of networks, each speaking to the 'nation as a whole', may find the 'national habit' hard to kick.

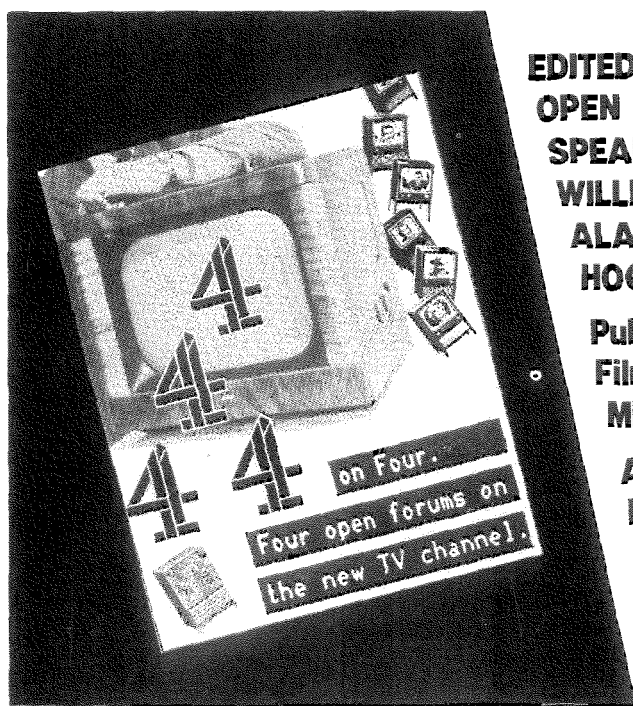
The audience for TV is an endless layering of minorities, all of which can sub-divide and reform on new lines, whether conceived in terms of class, sex, educational background, income, geography, or merely what people are interested in.

To adopt the language, in its broadest sense, of a minority that resists the hegemony of dominant ideology, risks, in a phrase widely used inside TV, 'preaching to the converted'. To open out, exploit, expand the fissures and contradictions in consensus ideology may require using the language formed in its construction. Not

everyone in a particular minority recognises that they are part of a minority, so great has been the incorporative power of the consensus. Without resorting to crude notions of false consciousness it often seems to the people working inside TV that to reach the potential minorities who – taken together – might overturn the consensus it is necessary to speak in the language that people understand. (By this I don't mean simply professional broadcasters addressing the Nation 'out there'; I mean anyone appropriating, taking over, having access to or making space for themselves on TV.)

This debate about modes of address, consensus, minorities, and ideological hegemony is going to become more rather than less important, and *Visible Fictions* is an extremely worthwhile contribution to it. Well informed, lucidly written and never claiming a certainty that would be premature, it is built on firm enough foundations to withstand the attacks that would come from orthodox thinkers' in the TV hierarchies – in the sadly unlikely event of them reading it.

All illustrations in this article are by Jonnie Turpie, from *Four on Four*.



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TELEVISION, THE 'RIOTS' AND RESEARCH

SCARMAN, TUMBER AND AFTER
BY PETER HERRIDGE



Recent discussion of the televisual signification of the civil disturbances in Britain's inner-city areas during 1981 has focused, not on the political role of the media in relationship to other state apparatuses such as Parliament and the police force, nor primarily on the content and form of the coverage, but on its supposed 'effects', as a factor contributing to the escalation and spread of the violence. The source of such interest is to be found in the Scarman Report of November 1981.¹

When Lord Scarman refers to the mass media in his report on the civil disturbances in Brixton and other areas, it is for 'figuring in the causation of the disorders', through what he describes as 'the copy-cat element' (p 111). He fails to define the term 'copy-cat' and more importantly presents no evidence whatsoever to support his assertion that the media

bear a responsibility for the escalation of the disorders (including the looting) in Brixton on Saturday 11 April and for their continuation the following day, and for the imitative element in the later disorders elsewhere.

Scarman's conclusions regarding the 'copy-cat' notion are, like many of those in his report, apparently the result of personal conjecture rather than carefully and systematically formulated research and investigation. Having dismissed many of the criticisms, particularly of harassment and racial discrimination, raised against the police, Scarman was no doubt searching for as many 'causes' as possible. Take, for example, the notion of 'outside influence' which is linked to the 'copy-cat' conjecture. He states (p 45),

On Saturday, however, outsiders did participate in the rioting. They were attracted into the action by the publicity given to Friday's events.

¹ Lord Scarman, *The Brixton Disorders, 10-12 April, 1981*, (the Scarman Report), London, HMSO, 1981. Page references are included in the text.

A forceful conclusion indeed. And Scarman reaches it despite having stated just two pages earlier that 'the evidence of leadership and of "outsider participation" is slight', 'too slight to amount to proof in a court of law' (p 43). The only 'evidence' referred to by Scarman with regard to 'outside influence' is that a police officer did not recognise the persons opposing the police as local people.² There are many such contradictions contained within the Report, and yet Scarman's assertion that his criticisms of the media deserved the fullest consideration by the Press Council, the Board of Governors of the BBC, the IBA, and newspaper editors, drew a rapid response from the BBC and the IBA.

The response took the form of a three months research project sponsored by the BBC and the IBA and conducted by Howard Tumber under the auspices of the British Film Institute's Broadcasting Research Unit. The results were published in a BFI pamphlet, *Television and the Riots*, on April 7 1982. Its funding by the television companies was more likely a response to the political stimulus of the Scarman criticisms than, as the author has suggested, the stirrings of the broadcasters' social conscience. According to Tumber the research resulted from a conversation between Stephen Hearst of the BBC and Michael Tracey of the BFI. A conversation in which Stephen Hearst,

as someone who well understood the concern and anxieties of every broadcaster in covering a difficult, delicate and dangerous situation,

² When one considers the size of the Brixton population it is inconceivable that someone would be able, with any degree of accuracy, to distinguish local people from 'outsiders' in a large street crowd. The notion of 'outside influence' is, however, essential to Scarman's argument since it places the majority of the 'rioters' in a form of double relationship to the normative (law and order) framework: they simultaneously occupy the position of in-group and out-group. The same is apparent in the role of 'pusher' to 'drugtaker', or 'militant' to 'moderate' trade unionist in the politico-industrial sphere. In short, the normative framework places the actions of the 'rioters' outside its own terms of reference: their actions are inexplicable, unjustifiable. However, if large numbers of people are seen to simultaneously oppose the norm, how is this to be explained without lending the status of rationality to their actions – the full development of a conflictual dynamic? The answer is simple; they were led astray, easily influenced by a small number of sinister and mysterious extremists.

had uppermost in his mind

*the stark question: had some of the rioting been caused by a copycat effect induced by television?*³

Although Michael Tracey in a Foreword to the pamphlet refers to the 'copycat' thesis', Tumber fails ever to define the term accurately or consistently. Is the suggestion that some of those watching television simply went out on to the streets and copied the activities they had seen portrayed on the screen? Or that the coverage attracted looters and agitators to the scene of events? Or indeed that television imparted certain necessary 'skills' required for 'looting' and 'rioting'? Tumber explores the origin of the term through various commentators, including Mary Whitehouse and Lord Scarman, but apparently fails to recognise an important contradiction – namely, that the term is being used to describe a number of different supposed phenomena. Hence no unified description is provided by these commentators, Tumber's only source of definition.

This point is crucial since, as Justin Wren-Lewis points out, Mrs Whitehouse's theory of media causality, when thought through, relates to explanations based upon the existence of police harassment and provocation; the "moral panic" generated by media coverage led to the heavy policing of inner city areas, some of which clearly responded'.⁴ A similar problem befalls Scarman's notion that media coverage drew outside agitators into the areas of disorder, since, as Knowles⁵ pointed out 30 years ago, successful agitation relies in the main on the existence of genuine grievances, in this case, as an interview

³ Howard Tumber, *Television and the Riots*, London, British Film Institute, 1982, p 1. Further page references are included in the text. (A slightly different account of the meeting between Hearst and Tracey is given by David Cox of London Weekend Television in *Television Today*, April 22 1982, in which the project is described as being of 'apparent mutual benefit', to the BBC and BFI representatives: a project in which 'Lord Scarman's own tool would be turned against him'.)

⁴ Justin Wren-Lewis, 'The Story of a Riot: The Television Coverage of Civil Unrest in 1981', *Screen Education*, Autumn/Winter 1981/2, no 40, p 29.

⁵ K Knowles, *Strikes: A Study in Industrial Conflict*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1952.

88 study⁶ which I carried out in Brixton on April 13/14 1981 revealed, deeply felt grievances, particularly over the increasingly coercive nature of policing methods and practices—a movement historically documented by Hall et al (1978).⁷

Tumber's approach is simplistic in the extreme; he appears to operate with a one-dimension, cause-effect model which he believes can simply be proved or disproved. He thus fails to realise that the criticisms made of television by moral entrepreneurs such as Scarman and Whitehouse cannot be divorced from the social milieu in which the events took place. The copycat effect, as presented by its proponents, involves the *a priori* assumption that violent youths are to 'blame' for the disorders: that is to say, the notion itself is set within a dominant law and order frame. The fact that the notion could equally well postulate escalation on the basis of over-reaction by the police, or agitation on the basis of genuinely felt grievance, is not considered by Scarman or Whitehouse. Neither is it considered by Tumber, who appears to accept their implicit assumptions.⁸

Having failed adequately to define the phenomena which he proposes to investigate, Tumber proceeds to adopt a research method which leaves much to be desired. As Tracey says in his Foreword, 'His method was simple. He went and talked with those who were at the eye of the storm: film crews, journalists, news executives, police, rioters.' Tumber simply asked some of those involved in the actual events, and those constructing the media definition of the events, if they felt that the television portrayal had produced a 'copycat effect'. A similarly effective method might be to go to Ascot and ask punters, bookmakers, and trainers if they feel that television coverage of racing encourages gambling. Nowhere does Tumber tell us how many persons were interviewed, and very little information is given regarding the type of questions posed. In common with the news

coverage of the events, Tumber spends far more time considering the views of the police than he does those of the rioters; the opinions of broadcasters receive more consideration than either. As a result of these interviews Tumber, in true Popperian style, claims to have *refuted* the copycat effect (p 49), a claim founded only on the basis that an unspecified number of respondents have failed to support an ambiguous and inadequately defined proposition.

If Tumber's work fails to answer many questions regarding the so-called 'copycat effect', it raises a number of questions concerning the political status of the research and the ability of elements within the state apparatus to affect the forum for academic debate. Tumber traces the origin of the copycat notion to a telegram sent by Mary Whitehouse to both the BBC and the IBA on July 11 1981, concluding that the issue is a fine example of Mrs Whitehouse's skill in setting an agenda for public debate and concern. Ironically though, the state legitimisation of the term through the Scarman Report and the subsequent television-funded project by Tumber suggest a similar setting of agenda for research—a process effectively abetted, it would seem, by the BFI.

A rather different focus of research might have resulted if the Scarman Inquiry had examined the media in the light of the criticisms proposed by the Kerner Report. Conducted in the wake of the US riots of 1967, it adopted a radically different methodological approach to that of the Scarman Inquiry: a team of approximately a hundred researchers were involved in a study which featured 1,200 interviews with participants, particularly rioters, in the 23 American cities in which rioting occurred. Kerner thus took account of the grievances and motivations of civilians engaged in riots and demonstrations, concluding that many of those grievances were genuine and that the USA was indeed a racist and divided society. The Report criticised the American mass media, not for escalating or contributing to the spread of the riots, but for failing adequately to understand and report the feelings and experiences of black Americans:

We believe that most news organisations do not have direct access to diversified news sources in the ghetto. Seldom do they have a total sense of what is going on there. ... To television executives who

⁶ Peter Herridge, unpublished thesis for the Royal College of Art, 1982. Forty-three people were interviewed in Brixton over two consecutive days.

⁷ Stuart Hall et al, *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State and Law and Order*, London, Macmillan, 1978.

⁸ Mary Whitehouse herself criticised Tumber for misrepresenting and simplifying her position. Charges of misrepresentation also came from William Belson (letters to the *Guardian*, April 1982).

*bemoan scores of underwatched documentaries, we say: find more ways of telling this story, for it is a story you, as journalists, must tell—honestly, realistically, and imaginatively. It is the responsibility of the news media to tell the story of race relations in America, and with notable exceptions, the media have not yet turned to the task with the wisdom, sensitivity, and expertise it demands.*⁹

Only in the conclusion to his report does Tumber relate similar criticisms, when he points to the lack of television coverage given to the opinions of those civilians participating in the disorders, and the preoccupation with law and order as an answer to the disturbances rather than as a possible cause.

Between January, 1978, and September, 1980, the Special Patrol Group (SPG) spent a total of four months, on four separate operations, in Brixton stopping and searching members of the local community. The 'Swamp '81' stop and search operation in the week before the disorders in Brixton stopped 943 community members and charged only 75. Only one of these was for robbery, the supposed 'target' of the exercise. Numerous descriptions outlined the extreme levels of harassment and racial prejudice displayed in these sort of operations. The discriminatory use of Section 4 of the Vagrancy Act 1824 ('Sus'), has been well documented in research. Stevens and Willis (1979)¹⁰ point out that blacks were 14 or 15 times more likely to be arrested for 'Sus' than were whites. Landau (1981)¹¹ examining juvenile crime in three London areas, North suburban, North inner-city, and South inner-city (an area which included Brixton), notes that 90% of 'Sus' arrests in his sample took place in the South London inner-city area. Of those arrested, over three-quarters were black, and two-thirds were charged by the police immediately rather than the more lenient course of referral to the juvenile bureau. These contradictions have not been articulated forcefully and analytically through the media.

The Brixton events received symbolic closure by the State in November 1981, through the publication of the Scarman Report. It is significant that the most critical piece of television reportage—in terms of articulating a contra-discourse of police harassment¹² by allowing media access to members of the local community—came *after* the publication of the Scarman Report, broadcasters having awaited their parliamentary cue. The November 28 1981 BBC *Special Report*, presented by Ludovic Kennedy, portrayed the events in the manner of the Scarman Report, complete with its piecemeal recognition and resolution of the contra-discourses, concluding in terms of police/community harmony and conveniently underplaying matters such as heavy policing, and ignoring the re-equipment of the police with riot-control apparatus, including water cannon.

The central theme of this programme, in common with the Scarman Report itself, was a notion of 'balance': a notion seeking to combine questions of law and order, police harassment, and socio-economic factors under a common hegemony. Not a difficult idea for television to articulate given the vague and deflated manner in which questions of police harassment and urban deprivation had been expressed previously through the media. The assertion was that some harassment by the police exists, but that this arises only as a result of the police fulfilling their essential task—the fight against crime; and, that urban deprivation indeed also exists, not only as a problem for the civilian community, but also that it makes the task of policing more difficult. Questions of socio-economic deprivation and harassment by the police were thus drawn within the bounds of the law and order discourse. These contra-discourses were rearticulated and subverted; drawn beneath the 'umbrella' of the dominant-hegemonic discourse. The BBC *Special* on the Scarman Report thus concluded with a debate 'Policing the Front Line', stressing the need for co-operation and understanding

⁹ Otto Kerner (Chairperson), *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders*, (the Kerner Report), New York, Bantam Books, 1968, p 384.

¹⁰ P Stevens and C Willis, *Race, Crime and Arrests*, Home Office Research Study no 58, London, HMSO, 1979.

¹¹ SF Landau, 'Juveniles and the Police', *British Journal of Criminology*, vol 21 no 1, January 1981.

¹² See Justin Wren-Lewis, *op cit*, p 16-17: 'Most subversive of these is what I shall refer to as the *contra-discourse*, a discourse that refers to police harassment, to oppressive and racist policing. Such a discourse stands the law and order frame on its head: the "solution" becomes a cause of the problem, the policeman and the rioter/demonstrator signify within a completely different range of legitimation.'

90 between the community and the police, without seriously questioning the actual role of the police.

The debate involved senior police officers and senior 'community leaders' discussing police/community relations in conciliatory terms. A fitting media closure to the 'riots', the programme featured a senior police officer, Barry Paine, Chief Constable of Kent and President of the Association of Chief Police Officers, reassuring the television audience that he may well overlook a black youth smoking cannabis, although he would come down hard on a 'pusher', and that if he were carrying out a saturation policing operation, even to stop the theft of turkeys at Christmas, he would always consult the local community. It is interesting to note that by February 17 1982 (three months later), the same senior police officer was, through the media, calling for the return of the death sentence as a deterrent to muggers!

The reason for this sudden change of heart is not difficult to understand. The notion of 'balance' does little to question the methods or actions of the police, since their role is seen as a reactive one: a response to a problem – crime. Thus to reassert their position the police have only to demonstrate that the problem is increasing. Hence it was that the police crime figures released on March 10 1982 were broken down by race for the category of 'robbery and other violent theft' (mugging)¹³ to 'reveal' that this was a crime predominantly committed by blacks. This break-down of just 3% of the total number of crimes by race illustrated and institutionalised the racism of the Metropolitan Police – racism for which Scarman claimed he could find no evidence. These figures, based on the victims' identification of their assailant, are open to error, discrimination, or outright racism on the part of the victim. The figures also showed that there were almost twice as many victims in the 21-30 age group (4,792) as in the over 60 age group (2,487), and that there was a slight predominance of male victims. (Thus the image of the 'little old lady' as the predominant victim was not supported by the figures.)

¹³ The term 'mugging' is adopted from the USA and has no strict legal meaning or definition. The term is used by the media to refer to a variety of offences of robbery and theft from the person.

Such factors were, however, totally lost in the television coverage. The 'statistics', presented in terms of a 'rising crime wave', formed the major story of every television news broadcast on the day of release. A central focus was the press conference in which Gilbert Kelland, Deputy Assistant Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police, released the robbery and violent theft figures. Elderly women victims of violent black robbers were singled out for television interviews, the 'muggings' issue being predominantly signified in terms of this stereotype. *News at Ten* showed film of a public meeting called by the police at Lambeth Town Hall in Brixton, in which a local man addressed the audience and offered his services as a vigilante, publically threatening to 'kill any bastard' involved in 'mugging'. The vigilante theme was allowed to pass completely unquestioned, as were the figures themselves. Perhaps the most ludicrous claim in the ensuing moral panic came in a television interview with Conservative MP Jill Knight, in which she claimed to know a nursery school teacher who could spot potential muggers at the age of three!

The publication two weeks later, in *New Society*,¹⁴ of part of the findings of a Home Office Research survey suggesting that saturation policing was not the most effective way of preventing mugging, and that such methods damaged relations between the police and public, went, by comparison, unnoticed by television. The research recommended local community-based uniformed policing as the most effective response to mugging. It also pointed out that mugging is an extremely rare offence and that the 'popular' conception of mugging as a frequent offence committed by young blacks upon old ladies is grossly inaccurate. The research also criticised some sections of the mass media for increasing public anxiety out of all proportion to the actual danger, through sensational reportage. This research received little coverage elsewhere.

That the police were operating a fully-blown media campaign was patently obvious. The recommendation of the Scarman Report for a return to community policing had been periodically criticised by police officers

¹⁴ Malcolm Ramsey, 'Mugging: Fears and Facts', *New Society*, March 25 1982.

throughout the early months of 1982. The release of the crime 'statistics' was followed by half-page advertisements in the national daily press and widespread television coverage of a campaign by the Police Federation for a return of the death penalty for murder (despite the fact that homicide rates are significantly declining). James Anderton, Chief Constable of Greater Manchester, made several television appearances, including an interview on *Nationwide*, arguing that right-wing politics are apolitical, while left-wing politics are dangerous, subversive, and undemocratic: statements which formed part of his own attempt to subvert the Police Committees. In fact, for well over a week,

television news virtually became a montage of policepersons; 'saturation policing' gave way to 'saturation media', but only, one assumes, as a prelude to an even greater return to the former.¹⁵ Once again, uncritical reportage functioned to legitimate oppressive policing methods. It is to this question, rather than that of the 'copycat effect', that the BBC, the IBA, and the BFI, would do well to direct their urgent attentions.

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¹⁵ The Conservative Government is currently proposing a considerable extension of the police powers to stop and search.

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REFUSING CONSENT: THE 'OI FOR ENGLAND' PROJECT

STUART COSGROVE
FOLLOWS TREVOR GRIFFITHS' PLAY
FROM SCREEN TO STAGE.

Oi For England, Trevor Griffiths' short polemical television drama on racism and resistance within contemporary youth culture, was written as a direct cultural response to the complex racial politics of Britain in the early eighties. According to Griffiths, the play was originally conceived of as a classroom drama aimed at young teenagers as part of a wider socialist campaign to combat the increasing recruitment activities of racist organisations within the secondary school system. The project took on a different direction when the riots of the summer of 1981 signalled another pressingly urgent political context. In an apparently direct way, the aggressiveness of the skinhead subculture found its expression in a musical style that seemed to refract the worst excesses of racism into a new youth phenomenon.¹ The skinheads of Oi-rock were of a quite different order to those who had appeared on the streets in the late sixties. The incidents in Southall, when the Hamborough Tavern was gutted during a racially provocative Oi concert, not only began a protracted period of social tension but also seemed to encapsulate the ambivalences of working-class belligerence. By the time *Oi For England* was broadcast in the spring of 1982 its subject matter had become dramatically familiar to television audiences after a summer of highly mediated social disturbance.

By constructing the narrative of *Oi For England* around the problems, disagreements and aspirations of a newly formed skinhead group named Ammunition, Griffiths set out to achieve two primary objectives: to reach a predominantly young audience and to interrogate the dominant images of social violence that had been in general cultural circulation over the previous twelve months. *Oi For England* resolutely refused to concede to easy generalisations about the skinhead subculture, preferring to see it, and the

music it gave rise to, as a confusion of different and competing energies. Beneath the surface of the group's racial arrogance is an unchannelled rejection of the existing social order: 'Law and Order/Up Your Arse/The Rules Are Bent/The Law's a Farce.' The group's songwriter, Finn, (a Mancunian skinhead of Irish extraction) is almost permanently in disagreement with Napper, who arrives late for rehearsals because of a premeditated attack on an Asian worker. It is Napper who introduces the group to the possibility of performing a gig at Platt Fields, as part of a neo-fascist rock concert, to be organised by a sinister figure known only as The Man. Although Finn's reservations are apparent almost from the start, they become more pronounced when The Man makes his appearance in the basement-room. It is in the character of Finn that Griffiths invests the elements of doubt and resistance:

Racism is endemic to this society. It's a white problem not a black one. And in so far as skinhead culture evinces that racism, it reflects the broader society. But skins are available to the political process and I'd like to give them a hearing... I don't see that fascists have any automatic right to

¹ Although Oi-Rock is a much more complex subcultural phenomenon than most recent media generalisations have implied, it remains defined by its associations with racism and skinhead style. At the height of the racial tension of 1981 the general availability of a rock album, *Strength Through Oi*, forged immediate relationships between the Oi-phenomenon and British neo-fascist organisations, particularly the British Movement. Subsequently, performance poets such as Garry Johnson (the author of *The Story of Oi*) and groups such as The Business and Infa-Riot have to some extent worked against Oi's racist image, but it remains an ambivalent and contradictory subculture.

*the skinhead, and if there is a struggle for his consciousness then one has to engage in it.*²

But from this progressive premise, *Oi For England* sets itself the onerous task of working within the formal constraints of a single-set location, and a naturalist style modified only by the inclusion of short video sequences of the riots. Although Griffiths attempted to combat the inherent restrictiveness of the form by incorporating a sound track of smashing glass and police sirens, the pressure to unify the action always militates against the vital representation of an outside social landscape. The determining world to which the skinheads belong is relegated to reports, descriptions and references.³

The most contentious sequence in *Oi For England*, and the one that has generated the most criticism from inside socialism, is the graphically racist speech delivered by The Man, in defence of his own attitudes to music and politics. He talks of a musical constituency in the outside world ready to hear the music of Ammunition, a constituency of 'Dole Boys, sick of being pushed around, ignored, shat upon, up to their necks in brown scum, the diarrhoea their rulers had seen fit to flood this England with'. With both hands clasped in front of him in a final and demonstrative gesture of the unification of music and politics, The Man's rhetorical image of 'chocolate England' occupies a pivotal and plausible place within the narrative. The powerful presence of The Man is partly due to Gavin Richards' formidable performance but also to the pervasive ways in which the character's brand of insidiously theatrical fascism insinuates its way around the dank walls of the basement set. Although The Man's repulsive fascination is a striking dramatic device, and one that gives fascism a brief period of unimpeded airtime, the play's narrative trajectory is more clearly constituted around the protagonist, Finn. At no time is there ever any significant doubt about who the audience's processes of identification are caught up with. In one sense

Oi For England is politically frank; it traces a central character's ambiguity through to a level of social realisation, and despite the more 'articulate' observations of The Man, it is Finn's development which projects the narrative towards a resolution.

Perhaps the most significant limitation of *Oi For England* is not so much the restrictiveness of its modified naturalist form, nor the brief space it concedes to racist rhetoric, but the manner in which the narrative moves inexorably towards an unsatisfactory resolution that remains trapped in inarticulacy and idealism. After two members of the group have left the basement to join in the confusion of looting and rioting in the streets outside, the drummer conveys his impulsive support and respect for Finn's anti-fascist stance and then sets off for home. Finn remains behind and is subsequently joined by the black daughter of the landlord who lets the premises in which the action takes place. A nervous but sympathetic relationship is struck up between the skinhead and the black girl and after several time ellipses the two of them dress up in martial arts equipment in readiness for ritualised combat on the streets. The girl is first to leave the



The Man meets the skins in *Oi For England*.

² 'Reds, Whites and Blue: The Politics of Colour', *New Musical Express*, April 17 1982, p 25.

³ Griffiths' attempts to work with and modify naturalist form are discussed in 'Transforming the Husk of Capitalism: An Interview with Trevor Griffiths', *Theatre Quarterly*, vol 6 no 22, Summer 1976.

94 basement, leaving Finn behind surrounded by amplifiers, guitars and a drum-kit. He switches on a cassette recorder which inexplicably plays lyrical Irish Folk music from Finn's 'ancestral' past. Confronted by the inarticulate anxieties brought about by the clash of two different working-class cultures, one lyrical, the other aggressive, Finn begins to smash the group's instruments. In a slow motion, hand-held sequence, Finn acts out the spectacular destructiveness of rock performance. The gesture is still trapped within aggression and inarticulacy but Finn has now turned against the looted instruments of Oi-Rock. In searching desperately for a political language, he destroys the means he had of giving expression to social frustrations but simultaneously attacks the symbolic reminders of the cacophonous language he has left behind. The ending implies that his aggressive creativity is still there but no longer available to racism. In an oblique way Finn's gesture indicates a move away from his cultural work towards direct political action: 'This time the song/Next time the fire.' Of course the resolution is problematic in all sorts of ways, and Griffiths himself has been critical of the drama's restricted potential.

*All this is done in favour of some sort of martial confrontation on the street, which isn't an enormously positive answer but maybe in the economic crisis the only one for someone like Finn. It's not his fault, but the overarching society's, the government's and the bureaucracy's fault.*⁴

The play ends without pointing forward in any clear direction, but the implication is that Finn will join the black girl and his own sister (who had been ridiculed by members of the group for admitting her Irish origins and being a fan of UB40) in inhabiting a multi-racial society without resorting to racism. Given its various limitations, it would be easy to dismiss *Oi For England* as a worthy but ill-conceived excursion by a reputable television dramatist. However, its production context and its subsequent history in live performance, makes *Oi For England* a particularly important example of the possibilities of urgent cultural practice.

From the very outset Trevor Griffiths intended *Oi For England* to address itself to a

very specific historical moment, and had no lingering misconceptions about the place it might or might not occupy within a hierarchy of British cultural values. To ensure that the play had an impact on the social tensions within youth culture when the riots were still in common memory, Griffiths aimed for an unusually fast production schedule. The entire project from the submission of the script during the winter of 1981 to the play's transmission in the spring of 1982, was geared towards speed and immediacy. The crew were recruited from Central TV's *Crossroads* serial and the studio time available to the production necessitated an uncomplicated single-set location.⁵ In any sustained critical analysis of *Oi For England*, its deficiencies have to be measured alongside the rigours of a production context brought about by the political advantages of immediate and urgent cultural representation. *Oi For England* exemplifies the determining pressures that industrial and production constraints put on formal structures. It bears the traces of a drama restricted by its own urgency.

Of the generation of dramatists that has emerged out of the British subsidised theatre in the period after 1968, Griffiths has consistently proved himself to be the most theoretically and politically acute. He has always acknowledged the ideological compromises in trying to work radically within the structures of television, but has remained attracted to the socially extensive audience that television reaches, and vehemently resists any mechanical generalisations about the monolithic nature of television production. A consistent feature of Griffiths' policy of 'strategic penetration' or 'cultural entryism' has been a corresponding reservation about the adequacy of the theatre as a means of political communication. For Griffiths the traditional theatre

is incapable, as a social institution, of reaching, let alone mobilising large popular audiences, at least in what is more and more desperately referred to as the free world. Success in the theatre can confer fame, prestige, wealth, critical acclaim and a place in literature but all of them will be pickled in a sort of class aspic. To write only for theatre is to watch

⁴ 'Reds, Whites and Blues', p 25.

⁵ Mike Poole, 'Mistaken Identities', *City Limits*, April 16-22 1982, p 38.

*only from the covered stand; you stay dry but there's a pitch dividing you from another possible, and possibly decisive, action on the terraces.*⁶

The analogy of action on the terraces is particularly appropriate to *Oi For England*, not only because of its subcultural resonances, but because the Oi-project has allowed Griffiths to renegotiate his attitudes to live theatrical performance. What initially sets *Oi For England* apart from almost every other television drama is the way in which it has transgressed the perimeters that normally delineate and separate cultural forms. In adapting the play for youth-club audiences, Griffiths has generated a political life beyond the tombs of Central TV's video archive, and instigated a cultural initiative that has intentionally bypassed the institutions of British theatre.

Although the television version of *Oi For England* was the playwright's primary concern, Griffiths wanted to maintain the kinds of immediate contact that had underpinned the initial ideas of a classroom drama. The second phase of the *Oi For England* project, which is still effectively in progress, was designed with the intention of making direct political interventions in the major multi-racial communities of London, Birmingham, Manchester, Leeds and Sheffield.⁷ Although the Royal Court Theatre was responsible for the London initiatives, there was always a desire to avoid the new institutionalism of the fringe, and to aim for non-theatrical venues within working-class territory. While not denying the importance of socialist organisations and cultural workers,

this specific project was geared to reaching a young working-class audience rather than an aesthetic or political vanguard. Griffiths has always been polemical in his refusal to become trapped in the social relationships that often beset genuinely independent and alternative culture. 'I have to work with the popular imagination which has been shaped by naturalism. I am not interested in talking to 38 university graduates in a cellar in Soho.'⁸

The fugitive and transient nature of live performance makes retrospective critical analysis particularly difficult. Although reports of *Oi For England* performances in youth-clubs and community centres in Hackney, the Isle of Dogs and Bethnal Green are many and varied, two particular criticisms have been regularly posited. Firstly, that the play's central issues often seemed to be too complex for audiences, and secondly, that the performances were potentially provocative, especially in areas with recent experiences of inter-racial gang fights. But perhaps both of these reservations suppress the overall advantages of exposing alternative perspectives to a significant constituency of young people, and perhaps they tend to displace the potential that emerged in post-production discussions and follow-up meetings. It needs to be borne in mind that the second phase of the Oi-project often took place as part of a wider scheme of youth club activities, particularly musical workshops, and that the play itself had been extensively reworked by Griffiths and the company.

The live version of *Oi For England* was adapted to include more musical interludes, making it more visibly like a rock gig; and The Man's persuasively racist speech was altered to make it less demonstrative. As part of general policy of local and regional reference, the settings and Mancunian names were changed to make the performance more immediate to its audience. Interestingly, the sequence in which Finn destroys the instruments was removed, not to contain the energies that his character embodies, but perhaps to discourage any assumption that the play advocates individual gestures of destruction?

⁶ Trevor Griffiths, Author's Preface to *Through the Night and Such Impossibilities*, London, Faber, 1977, pp 7-8.

⁷ The most recent controversy surrounding *Oi For England* has been in South Yorkshire, where a protracted and public debate ensued as a result of South Yorkshire County Council's decision not to fund Doncaster Arts Co-operative's touring version of the play. It was scheduled to be performed in youth clubs in Barnsley, Wakefield and Doncaster if funding was allocated. The Council's decision provoked a complicated argument about the play's aesthetic and political merits, which involved Griffiths in a lengthy altercation with Barnsley's left-wing Labour councillor, Jack Brown. See for example the *Guardian* October 8 1982 and the *Barnsley Chronicle* October 8 1982.

⁸ Janet Wolff, 'Bill Brand, Trevor Griffiths, and the Debate About Political Theatre', *Red Letters*, no 8, p 57.

In transgressing the normal cultural categories by becoming a live performance after its life as a television drama, *Oi For England* seems to point forward to a relatively uncharted area of political culture. Its recognition of the need to continually regenerate representation within an urgent political moment, and its insistence on addressing an unsafe constituency of politically divided, and perhaps even culturally hostile, young people is one of the ways in which independent projects can take part in the decisive action on the terraces. For the alternative theatre movement, *Oi For England* draws attention to a significant gap: despite the phenomenal expressiveness of British youth subculture, there is neither a theatre nor a dramatist that has consistently worked towards subcultural theatre.

Finally, *Oi For England* marks an important and self-conscious development in Griffiths' own authorial career. Coming as it did in the wake of his television adaptations of D H Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers* and Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard*, it signals a move away from 'classicism' back to the contemporary. Its difference from Griffiths' previous television play, *Country*, a long and complex Chekhovian critique of the

post-war British aristocracy's attitudes to socialism, could not be more apparent. To extend the musical metaphors, *Oi For England* is a three minute punk single recorded in a garage, set against the multi-track, concept-album nuances of *Country*. At the point at which it seemed that Trevor Griffiths had taken his place in a comfortable niche of 'socialist art' television, *Oi For England* arrived to provoke critical indignation. In almost seeking this indignant response, *Oi For England* carries with it the traces of Gethin Price's stubborn resistance in *The Comedians*: 'I stand in no line, I refuse my consent.'⁹ It is a refusal to surrender to the categorisation that often serves to emasculate the work of radical cultural practitioners, and a refusal to represent working-class subcultures as hopelessly trapped in racism and ignorance.¹⁰

⁹ Trevor Griffiths, *The Comedians*, London, Faber, 1976, p 66.

¹⁰ The critical reviews of the Royal Court Theatre's version of *Oi For England* at the Theatre Upstairs are collected together in *London Theatre Record*, June 3-16 1982, pp 321-323.

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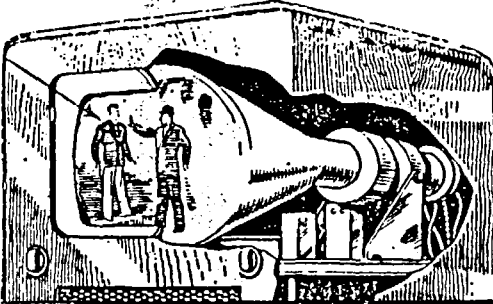
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Provisional Timetable

10.00 am	Coffee and Introduction	
10.30	Opening Address by Gillian Skirrow What does an analysis of available teaching materials suggest about the constitution of media studies? What developments could be proposed?	
11.30	Seminars and Discussion	
1.00 pm	Lunch	
2.15	Interventions Contributors to a number of different curriculum developments outline their work. Short statements will be available in advance.	
		3.45 Tea
		4.00 Seminars
		5.00 Plenary
		5.30 Close

The contributions will feed into debate on the question—
What do these interventions assume about media studies and what developments do they propose?

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